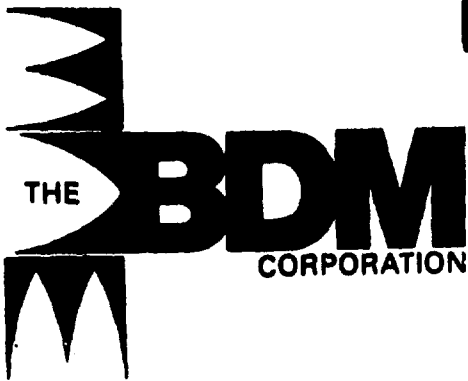
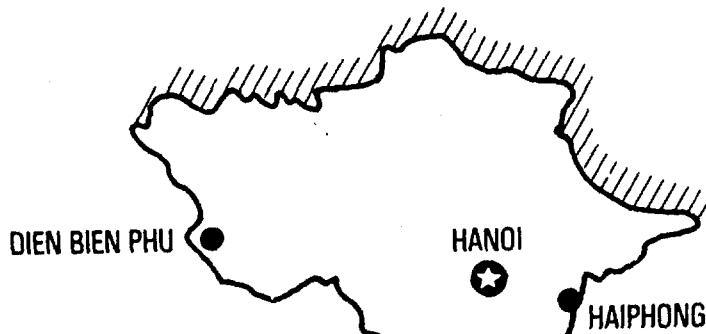


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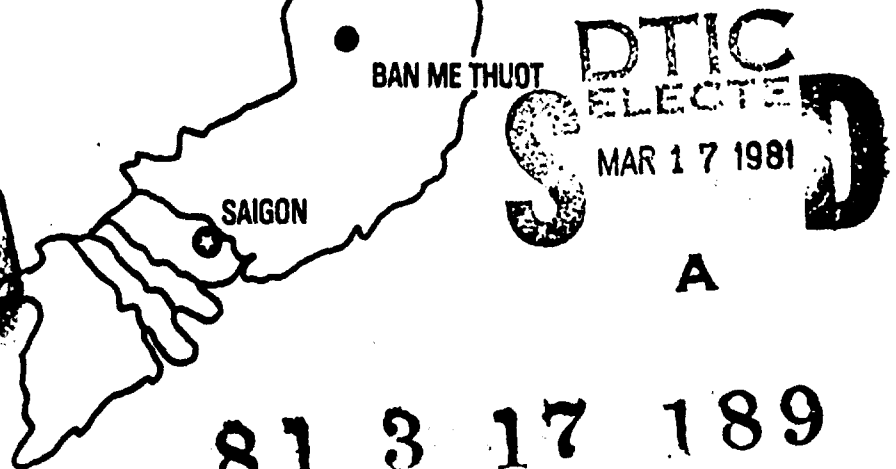


*A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned  
in Vietnam*

# VOLUME II SOUTH VIETNAM

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REPLY TO  
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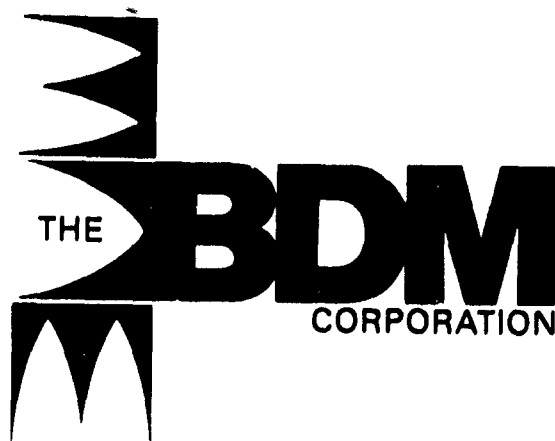
SUBJECT: Declassification of the BDM Study, "The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam"

Defense Technical Information Center  
ATTN: Ms. Betty Weatherholtz  
Cameron Station  
Alexandria, VA 22314

1. Your organization was on the distribution list for the BDM study, "The Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam." The study was assigned AD numbers B048632L through 641L.
2. In December 1980, the Army War College Security Office notified all recipients of the study by telephone that it contained classified information and should be secured.
3. BDM now has revised the appropriate pages of the study to delete all classified information and has conformed to all other requirements required by the clearance review.
4. A revised copy of the study which is unclassified and approved for public release is inclosed. DTIC Form 50's are inclosed for assignment of new AD numbers.

Incls  
as

*Andrew C. Remson, Jr.*  
ANDREW C. REMSON, JR.  
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December 28, 1979

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⑥  
A STUDY OF STRATEGIC LESSONS  
LEARNED IN VIETNAM.  
VOLUME II.  
SOUTH VIETNAM.

This draft report is submitted to DAMO-SSP.

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# THE BDM CORPORATION

## FOREWORD

This Study is a final draft submitted to DAMO-SSP for review in accordance with the provisions of Contract No. DAAG 39-78-C-0120.

The task is to identify and analyze lessons that should be learned from three decades of US involvement in Vietnam. This is Volume II of the Study.

Volume I	The Enemy
Volume II	South Vietnam
Volume III	US Foreign Policy and Vietnam 1945-1975
Volume IV	US Domestic Factors Influencing Vietnam War Policy Making
Volume V	Planning the War
Volume VI	Conduct of the War
Volume VII	The Soldier
Volume VIII	The Results of the War

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PREFACE

A. PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This volume is the second of an eight-volume study that examines specific aspects of the Vietnam conflict to determine lessons the United States, and especially the United States Army, should have learned from that experience of 1954-1975. The first two volumes of this study examine the character, goals, organization and performance of the North and South Vietnamese. Volumes III and IV analyze US foreign policy, domestic issues and constraints on US political and military leadership. Volumes V to VII examine the war effort and the changes that were taking place in the US soldier during the war years. Volume VIII discusses in broad terms the results of the war for the United States in domestic, foreign policy, and military terms.

This study effort is analytical, not historical. Its primary focus is on the military perspective. The purpose of the entire set of volumes is not to recount the events of the Vietnam conflict, but to gain insights pointing to concrete lessons that can be of value to future US decision makers, both military and civilian.

Great care has to be exercised before transposing our experience in the Vietnam conflict to other parts of the world on the simplistic assumption that "history repeats itself" and that the lessons learned in the Vietnam conflict will be universally applicable elsewhere. The variables present in the Vietnam situation made the circumstances unusual if not in some cases unique.

B. PURPOSE OF VOLUME II, SOUTH VIETNAM

→ This volume is concerned with the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), focusing primarily on the society, the government and its armed forces. The long subjugation of the Vietnamese population by the Chinese and the French, and the periods of relative independence, have exerted manifold influences on

the society, the government and the military. Those influences have molded the Vietnamese into a tenacious and resilient folk able to endure great hardships. The most significant negative influence was the one-hundred-year colonial rule by the French, which severely inhibited the development of political and military leadership and hindered the economic development of Vietnam's human and material resources. That disability was vastly more pronounced in South Vietnam than it was in the North, primarily because of the nature of the French presence during the colonial period.

The anticommunist struggle waged in South Vietnam is divided into four distinct periods: 1) the French era (1945-1954); 2) the US advisory period (1955-1964); 3) the US presence (1965-1971); and 4) the final phase (1972-1975). During the latter two periods, the South Vietnamese armed forces, with US support, performed credibly during Tet, the Cambodian incursion, and the communist Easter offensive. Conversely, the endemic and chronic deficiencies in RVNAF leadership which surfaced in 1975 manifested themselves in the 1971 RVNAF Lam Son Offensive in Laos. The ultimate failure in leadership and command occurred despite the intensive efforts of both the South Vietnamese and US military authorities to prevent it from happening.

The chapters of this volume each examine a specific aspect of South Vietnam to provide an understanding of the environment, people, and government and the factors that contributed to the collapse of the Republic. The following topics are examined:

- The societal structure and significant differences between US and Vietnamese societies;
- The governmental structure and US/GVN working relationships;
- The influence of geography and climate on the conduct of the war;
- The South Vietnamese economy and the impact of US aid and physical presence on that economy;
- The development and performance of the South Vietnamese armed forces and their leadership;
- The morale and will of the South Vietnamese people and the influence of the American presence; and
- The domestic and international constraints on GVN policy.

C. THEMES THAT EMERGE FROM VOLUME II: SOUTH VIETNAM

This study of South Vietnam identified six basic themes which are evident in each of the chapters describing the country, its people, and the government. Those themes are:

- The lack of skilled manpower and material resources
- The religious, regional, and ethnic animosities
- The failure to understand the ally or the enemy
- The constraints imposed on the GVN and the RVNAF
- The question of legitimacy of the GVN after Diem
- The inefficiency and corruption in GVN and the RVNAF

South Vietnam's human and material resources were insufficient to build a viable nation while simultaneously engaging in a war of national survival. Much of the material resource deficiencies were a result of France's economic colonial policy, which made Vietnam a supplier of raw materials to factories in France with insufficient return to develop a viable Vietnamese economy. Likewise, the French civil and military policies greatly inhibited the development of an indigenous national leadership which was urgently needed to build a nation and fight a war.

The second theme is that of fragmentation. The South suffered much more than the North from the divisive elements of its religious and sectarian conflict, regional origins, ethno-linguistic differences, economic/geographic imbalance, and intractable political interest groups. Throughout South Vietnam's years of independence, managing and manipulating these disparate and conflicting factors was one of the most burdensome labors to be endured by each regime in power.

There was an endemic failure of the South Vietnamese political and military establishments to understand their own people or their ally, the United States. In many of its reactions to domestic unease, the government alienated the people whose support it needed most. Its failures at land reform, rural economic development, controlling inflation, and suppression of political opposition played into the hands of communist and antiwar propagandists. The South Vietnamese government (and sometimes the US) did

not appreciate the limits of the American military, political, and economic commitment to their nation. That lack of perception was apparent when the United States announced in 1969 its intention to withdraw from a major combat role.

There were many severe constraints placed on the South Vietnamese government's attempt to build an independent nation and simultaneously conduct a war of survival. Some of the constraints derive from the themes noted here, namely lack of requisite resources and factionalism. Important consideration must be given to the external constraints imposed by the United States. The United States imposed its concepts and doctrines on the RVNAF after 1965, and restricted RVNAF offensive actions and defined certain rules of engagement. The final cut off of US aid and support progressively sapped the ability, morale, and will of the Vietnamese government, military and public. Throughout hostilities, the enemy further constrained the GVN by its political-military offensives.

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam was recognized as a legitimate government by communist nations beginning in 1945 and by most of the world in 1954. The Geneva accords of 1954 did not intend that a separate Republic of (South) Vietnam would come into being or that any form of a separate South Vietnamese entity would exist beyond 1956, when nationwide elections were to be held. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the RVN was questioned from its birth by a substantial number of nations; this was a vulnerability that was continually exploited by the DRV and its southern cadres.

The last theme evident throughout this volume is the extensiveness of the inefficiencies and corruption in the various South Vietnamese governmental agencies. Despite US and South Vietnamese efforts to correct the manifold deficiencies in administration, and the outright criminality in the conduct of official affairs, those problems were not resolved. Indeed, of all critical disabilities impairing the survival of South Vietnam, this theme has to be considered as one of the most important.

D. SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS AFFECTING SOUTH VIETNAM

The heritage of French colonial rule and the massive influx of US material and human resources are the two most significant factors attendant to South Vietnam's brief period of independence. From the first stems the nature and character of South Vietnam's governmental and military leadership, and from the latter, the manner in which the war was conducted. Many of the elements in the historical background of South Vietnam are discussed in Chapter 5. Significant and related events are depicted in Figure II-1.

YEAR	1940	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
US LEADERSHIP PRESIDENT AMBASSADOR TO RVN	F D ROOSEVELT	HARRY S TRUMAN									DWIGHT D EISENHOWER							JOHN F KENEDY
										DONALD R HEATH		G F REINHART		ELBRIDGE DUBROW				FREDERICK D. LOVELL
SOUTH VIETNAM GOVERNMENTS	JAPANESE OCCUPATION	BRITISH AND CHINESE OCCUPY INDOCHINA	BAO DAI									DIEM NGU PHUONG						
	JAPAN GRANTS VIETNAM INDEPENDENCE									GENEVA ACCORDS								
COMMUNIST VIETNAMESE LEADERSHIP										COMMUNIST DEFEAT FRENCH AT DIEN BINH PHU		DIEM CALLS FOR PREPARATIONS FOR 1956 ELECTIONS TO UNIFY VIETNAM						
		HO CHI MINH																
SELECTED POLITICAL EVENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM	JAPAN GRANTS VIETNAM INDEPENDENCE				HO LONG BAY AGREEMENT - FRANCE RECOGNIZES VIETNAM AS AN "ASSOCIATED STATE"						DIEM ELECTED PRESIDENT BAO DAI DEFEATED		DIEM'S PARTY WINS 98 PERCENT OF PARLIAMEN- TARY ELEC- TIONS		FOUNDING OF NLF		DIEM'S REGI- MENT ELIMINATED BY OVERWHELMING MAJORITY	PARATROOP COUP AGAINST DIEM FAILS
SELECTED MILITARY EVENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM						VNLF FORMALLY CREATED				VIETNAMESE ASSUME LEADERSHIP OF RVNAF	FRENCH HIGH COMMAND IN VN IS ABOLISHED	PHASE I INSURGENCY INITIATED BY VET BATTAL			PHASE II VC ATTACK TRAINING SIP			
SELECTED EVENTS INVOLVING THE US IN VIETNAM						US BEGINS AID THROUGH FRENCH					US MAAG ESTABLISHED			US BEGINS FOOD FOR PEACE PROGRAM		US SPECIAL FORCES IN RVN		US AGREES TO SEND INCREAS- ING MILITARY AND IN MORE INITIAL U.S. MILITARY ADVISORS CONCEPT MAKING VALLEY - DEVELOP
SELECTED ECONOMIC EVENTS												GOVERNMENT ORDINANCE NO. 3 TO REDUCE FOREIGN COMMERCIAL INVOLVEMENT	FIRST 5 YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN BEGINS			AGAOVILLE PROGRAM		
SELECTED SOCIAL EVENTS											RESETTLEMENT OF NORTHERN REFUGEES	DIEM'S LAND REFORM PROGRAMS						
YEAR	1940	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961

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Figure II-1. Significant Events Related to the Vietnam Conflict



# THE BDM CORPORATION

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### VOLUME II

The Second Indochina War (1961\*-1975) was fought to determine who would have the ultimate physical and political control of the southern half of Vietnam. Despite tactical shifts to meet changing circumstances, the leaders of the Lao Dong Party never waived from their primary goal of unifying Vietnam under their control. The precariously unified RVN fought from the first to last for its existence as a noncommunist entity. While this same end was desirable and important to the US, it was so only as a means towards larger, but changing strategic goals; e.g., containment of communism, defeat of "Wars of National Liberation," preservation of US prestige and credibility, and, finally, withdrawal of US forces "with honor." From birth until death the RVN was beset with major weaknesses - societal, political, economic and military, - and was extremely dependent on US support for its survival. During its 20-odd years of existence the RVN experienced two relatively stable and encouraging periods: 1956 to 1960 and 1969 to 1972. But on balance, without massive US support, the RVN was never a match for its more cohesive, better organized and well-supported opponents. Given the goal and determination of its enemies and the increasingly unfavorable balance of forces after the 1973 cease-fire, it was only a matter of time and circumstance before the RVN fell. Some South Vietnamese leaders said, in retrospect, that "fate" was not on their side. It wasn't, nor was much else of significance in 1975.

---

\*The Second Indochina War is shown by various authorities to have begun anytime from 1956 to 1965.

# THE BDM CORPORATION

## INSIGHTS

### Society

- Potential forces for unity in the Republic of Vietnam, especially in rural areas, included nationalism, tradition, and, to a degree, anticommunism; and these forces were either:
  - pre-empted by the NLF (VC), or
  - improperly exploited by GVN (especially after Diem) and/or diminished by the massive US presence
- The overwhelming forces of disunity in RVN included:
  - religious and cultural rivalries
  - urban/rural dichotomy, compounded by the flood of refugees to the cities
  - regional prejudice and favoritism
  - the growing split between the young and the old, especially in the urban areas
  - multiple ethnic divisions and subdivisions
  - proliferation of cliques and political factions
- Weak unpopular leadership, divisive politics, a faltering economy, the lack of a common and compelling goal, and the pressures generated by the nature and pervasiveness of the war tended to split rather than to unite the society.
- The increasing, if reluctant, dependence of the anti-communist segment of the society on US physical and moral support left them psychologically vulnerable when that support was withdrawn.
- The wide differences, historical, cultural, political and environmental, between the American and Vietnamese societies resulted in:
  - significant misperceptions which led to faulty policies by the leaders in both countries, especially during the critical early years of the Diem regime.
  - a general lack of understanding and sympathy in the US for the South Vietnamese which adversely affected support for the protracted conflict. (As the war dragged on and as costs and casualties rose, the generally negative slant of the news media and antiwar groups helped nurture dislike of and disgust with our South Vietnamese allies, especially with their leaders).
  - difficulties between US soldiers and the South Vietnamese which helped fuel anti-US sentiment and riots. (The potential for these emotions always existed since Vietnamese generally distrust foreigners).

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- Key officials of both the USG and GVN recognized early the absolute necessity for creating a solid basis for societal unity and nationalism in RVN; differing perceptions of the problems involved, however, often led to conflicting programs aimed at reaching the common end.
- The DRV and the NLF had greater success, overall, in exploiting to their advantage the societal rifts in RVN than did the GVN and the US; the skillful use of front organizations permitted the former to claim with some credibility, both in-country and abroad, that they were the only legitimate representatives of all the peoples of Vietnam and that the US was the neocolonialist/imperialistic successor to the French.

### LESSON

In order to gain the final political-military victory, the leaders of a communist-styled insurgency (People's War) thoroughly analyze and skillfully exploit inherent and potential contradictions in the target society with the aim of alienating large segments of the population, especially in the rural areas, from their government; a powerful ally, which possesses incomplete or incorrect knowledge of that society, tends to interfere with the government under siege and also presents psychological-political opportunities to the opponents.

INSIGHTS

Government

- The structure and operational methods of the GVN initially were influenced by the French, but over time became more Americanized; neither model was suited to the political environment or the managerial styles of the various key leaders of RVN.
- There was an insufficient base - historical, cultural, social and political - to establish an effective Western-style democratic government in RVN, especially in light of internal and external insecurity; there was also a lack of an adequate corps of political leaders - in numbers, character, experience, and political sensitivity.
- The lack of sufficient knowledge of our ally, its opponents, and the nature of the conflict in Indochina - by the USG, the media, and the public - led to unrealistic expectations concerning GVN which inevitably resulted in frustration and contempt, and eventually to withdrawal of support.
- The overthrow of the Diem Regime was one of the very few key watersheds of the Second Indochina War; although Diem might have lost the war eventually, his assassination resulted in:
  - political, military and economic chaos for about three years
  - an irreversible loss of GVN legitimacy and popularity, particularly among the rural peoples
  - massive, prolonged and eventually self-defeating US military intervention
  - erosion of the US moral basis for the war, and conversely a deeper commitment to support the successive governments regardless of their worth
  - the political power in RVN was concentrated among the senior leaders of the RVNAF, and there was no trust or loyalty among themselves or with the Chief of State.

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- For different reasons and due to changing circumstances, each separate GVN hindered attainment of US objectives, but since those objectives only periodically and partially coincided with those of the RVN the reverse also was true; Thieu's regime, however, provided sufficient if only temporary strength and stability which permitted the US to withdraw her power with self-proclaimed "honor."
- With numerous exceptions, the working relationships between the USG and GVN at the various levels were characterized by:
  - misunderstandings and even naivety on both sides, initially, at all levels
  - a "teacher-pupil" relationship at the higher levels; Diem, however, refused to accept the latter role, so during his regime it was more akin to two ministers preaching about different religions simultaneously
  - an inept, ineffective, but sometimes arrogant, use of leverage by USG officials
  - more mutual understanding and empathy at the lower levels
  - more acceptance of advice by military than by political leaders due to a common "language" and the fact that the RVNAF leaders were impressed by and dependent on US efficiency and might
  - the rapid turnover and relative inexperience of US advisors
  - the very substantial US aid and advice at each echelon; when this was drastically cut back after January 1973 an unfillable psychological and physical void was created.

### LESSON

In the absence of a leadership that can command broad popular support, a Western-style democracy is likely to be inappropriate for an emerging agrarian-based society, especially when that society is vulnerable to heavy internal and external pressures; if the majority of such a country insists on this type of political structure as an inflexible requirement for support, the chances for success decrease sharply.

INSIGHTS

Climate and  
Geography

- There was insufficient appreciation at the Washington level of the constraints imposed by the climate of Southeast Asia on aerial reconnaissance and bombing, and much of the Washington-level planning and target designation was ineffective.
- The geography and climate of Indochina were more suitable to a 'People's' War than they were to conventional military operations and should have exerted more influence in the initial structure and training of RVNAF.
- The two monsoons which heavily influenced the economies of Indochina also dictated that military operations be planned on a Wet-Dry Season basis rather than by calendar year.
- The numerous waterways in the Mekong Delta led MACV to resurrect the ways and means of fighting a Riverine war.
- Political geography conveyed strategic advantage to the DRV by making possible the effective use of sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia enabling them to limit casualties and stockpile massive quantities of war materiel.
- The primitive nature of the transportation infrastructure in RVN did not accommodate operations by large, modern military forces with sophisticated equipment, and the US found it necessary to commit vast military and commercial resources to build a new, modern transportation system.
- The US dealt with the Southeast Asian region on the basis of geopolitical boundaries, and consequently fractionalized its political and military efforts; the DRV treated the region as a single theater of operations, thereby gaining the initiative.

LESSON

The peculiarities of climate, topography and political geography, their constraints on military operations, and the possibilities for exploiting those peculiarities politically or militarily in any given region may be viewed in an entirely different way by the protagonists in an armed struggle. It is imperative that these potential constraints and advantages be evaluated from the enemy's perspective as well as one's own and the consequences be assessed.

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## INSIGHTS

### Economy

- Among other shortcomings, too few officials in GVN were experienced, efficient, dedicated, and honest enough to plan for and administer effectively a feeble economy in a wartime environment; whether they ever could have succeeded in doing so during peace is a matter of conjecture.
- The economic warfare tactics pursued by the NLF/PLAF - and later the PAVN - seriously reduced the production, transport, and sale of the RVN's major economic assets - rice and rubber.
- The presence of large numbers of Western troops - French and then even greater numbers of US - modified and strained the agrarian-based economy, and fueled wartime inflation by their insatiable demands for services and retail goods.
- Conversely, this demand for goods and services absorbed many of the unemployed refugees generated by the severe fighting; later the withdrawal of US forces created a huge economic void.
- Massive firepower, search and destroy, defoliation, etc. - created hundreds of thousands of refugees and resulted in severe damage to rice fields, plantations, and forests.
- The extremely heavy manpower demands of the interwoven conventional/unconventional war were in direct conflict with those of the labor-intensive, agrarian economy, particularly in competition for the extremely limited pool of skilled manpower.
- The war, US opulence, numerous indigenous US employees, and import programs created an urban consumer society which, like its government, became increasingly dependent on a large US presence and abundant aid.
- After the 1973 ceasefire, the drastic reductions in US military and economic aid pulled out the only real props which had supported the feeble RVN economy; corruption and the oil embargo added to the spiraling inflation which eventually might have toppled the GVN without a battle.

### LESSON

An agrarian-based economy is labor intensive, relatively inflexible, and is acutely sensitive not only to the hazards of nature but also to the demands of large-scale warfare; further it is quite vulnerable, to the Mao-Ho concept of "People's War"; a large protracted US presence, most likely will contort and eventually cripple such an economy and will force it to become almost totally dependent on massive and sustained US aid.



INSIGHTS

Military

- The RVNAF, especially its senior leaders, were heavily influenced by the French and then by the US; because of this dependency, they never developed an original doctrine or strategy.
- Too many RVNAF leaders became overly dependent on the US advisory network, not only for obtaining fire and logistics support, but also for planning, coordination, and moral support; when this support was withdrawn, the impact was severe.
- In a developing, largely rural nation it is easier and better to train and equip "up", as did the Viet Minh and later the PLAF and PAVN by necessity, than it is to try the reverse, under pressure, as did the RVNAF towards the end; they had "forgotten how to walk" and could no longer afford to ride or fly.
- RVNAF, due to our advice (insistence) and the ineptness of most of their senior leaders, were unprepared, physically and mentally, to meet the enemy at critical stages of the conflict:
  - In the late 1950's and early 1960's they were organized, equipped and trained to fight a possible battle against PAVN, but not the actual struggle against the NLF and the PLAF.
  - In Laos, in 1971, they tried, at our urging, to employ US tactics and techniques without the necessary means, experience or leadership; their ultimate defeat there should have acted as both a warning and a prod.
  - At the onset of the 1972 Easter offensive they were prepared to fight battles at individual "fire support" bases, and were caught by surprise by the massive mobile warfare tactics and equipment employed by PAVN.
  - In 1975, they still had not absorbed the "lessons" of 1971 and 1972 and thus were unprepared again, to fight a large-scale war of movement. (Of course by that time they had neither the means nor the will to defeat the enemy, but they should have done much better than they did.)
- One of our most difficult tasks, and serious failures, was the attempt to build a strong and reliable leadership corps in RVNAF. Given the nature of the social base, the politicization of the military and the background of the senior leaders, the odds for success were not good though the road to failure was not preordained.

LESSONS

The political role of the Armed Forces of a nation is critical; military forces which form the political base of a regime are often susceptible to politicization whereby the leaders are chosen, promoted, and favored for political loyalty rather than professional skill. There is a tendency when advising or assisting an emerging nation to organize, equip and train them in one's own image, a pattern which is difficult to alter or reverse if the guiding premises prove to be faulty during a conflict.

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## INSIGHTS

### Morale and Will

- Next to general instability and inferiority in leadership, the gravest shortcoming of GVN and RVNAF was their inability to generate and sustain an adequate level of morale; weak leadership was one of the causes of this failure.
- The precipitate nationwide decline in South Vietnamese morale and will from a relative high following the defeat of the communists' 1972 Easter offensive, resulted from the widespread belief that they had been abandoned in an untenable position by the only world power that could stave off their defeat; the rapid collapse of the GVN and RVNAF in the spring of 1975 was due in large measure to the failure by the USG to provide the aid and military support that had been promised.
- Given the prevailing circumstances it was beyond the capacity of the US, itself suffering leadership and morale problems, to impart to the RVNAF a sufficiently high level of morale and will to enable RVNAF to prevail.

## LESSON

The Second Indochina War dramatically demonstrated the importance of good morale. An external power cannot easily generate morale and determination within another society; it can, however, create, even unintentionally, false and fragile hopes that if dashed will adversely affect these important qualities.

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### INSIGHTS

#### Constraints on Policy

- The RVN, from beginning to end, never possessed anything like the leadership, experience, cohesiveness, organization, and determination (ruthlessness) of their enemies - the DRV and the NLF - and never had a sufficient mandate or the strength to compete as an equal.
- Even in their most hopeful periods - the mid years of the Diem and Thieu regimes - the national, political, and economic bases of power were narrow and fragile.
- Without substantial US support, the RVNAF were seldom a match for their enemies because of an overall lack of solid leadership and self confidence.
- By becoming totally wedded to US tactics and techniques, the RVNAF were relatively helpless when deprived of the ways, means and experience which make the US system effective.
- Both the GVN and the RVNAF became too closely identified with the French and then with the US to retain a serious chance of establishing themselves as true nationalists; the anticommunist theme lacked strength and direction.
- The January 1973 ceasefire, which permitted PAVN and PLAF forces to remain "in place" (the leopard spots) throughout key areas in South Vietnam, placed the RVN in an untenable geo-strategic position; the RVNAF was spread too thinly throughout their territory, lacked a strategic reserve, and could not mass sufficient forces quickly enough to counter multiple heavy attacks.
- The drastic reduction of US economic, military, and political support following the "peace with honor" produced a rapid deterioration of the physical and moral strength of both the GVN and the RVNAF; by January 1975 only a miracle could have saved the RVN from total defeat.
- In summary, the constraints facing RVN were formidable by any standards. Many of them were inherent in their society and politics while others were imposed by their enemies. While US misperceptions and incorrect policies inhibited their freedom of action, RVN could not and did not survive without US support.

### LESSON

In today's global environment, the freedom of action of all nation states is constrained by both internal and external pressures, but an emerging nation - lacking a unifying cause and strong leadership - is so severely circumscribed as to be nearly impotent without a powerful and consistent sponsor; depending on the wisdom and continuity of its policies and actions, that sponsor can either ameliorate or compound the constraints facing its ally.

OVERALL LESSON  
FOR VOLUME II

The United States is likely to do itself and its ally more harm than good if it commits its power and prestige to the preservation of a weak and struggling nation without first understanding and interpreting correctly the client state's history, culture, economy, environment, political dynamics, and potential enemies - both external and especially internal; the United States must understand its own strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their likely impact on a fragile, underdeveloped society and its institutions. This generality, however, does not provide policy makers with a built-in rationale for inaction or vacillation when vital issues or interests are at stake.

CHAPTER 1  
CHANGING SOCIETY

Our policy makers should have perceived the problems involved in trying to impose our political and economic concepts and patterns on an alien society. A study of South Vietnam's divisive society by a team of political scientists, historians, economists, sociologists, and anthropologists could have highlighted the fragile nature of the body politic in that former French colony, South Vietnam.

General William Westmoreland

Where the preexisting European ingredients of success are missing, the power to work miracles is, not surprisingly, nonexistent. Governments can be influenced, but where governments are weak and their power negligible, the power implicit in so influencing them is also predictably negligible.

John Kenneth Galbraith

A. INTRODUCTION

In 111 B.C. the area known as NamViet was conquered by the Chinese. The Chinese reign over this early Vietnamese state was to last for over 1000 years--with three brief periods of Vietnamese independence--and cause far-reaching and long-lasting changes for the Vietnamese people. Vietnamese feudalism was destroyed in the process of building a centralized, Chinese-controlled government. Families were grouped into communes. The Chinese dress, language, and classics were adopted.]

But perhaps the most important consequence of Chinese control over Vietnam was the adoption of Confucianism. The philosophy of Confucius (or, more properly, Confucian-Mencian thought) eventually colored the whole spectrum of Vietnamese life, from politics and economics to religion. In essence, Confucianism advocated a stable, deferential society in which the members acquiesced to the wiser commands of the ruler. The leaders at the Imperial court were to be scholars chosen after intense study of the classics and successful completion of difficult examinations. As Confucius

said, "The ruler is like the wind and the commoners the grass blades. When the wind blows, the grass blades have to bend under it."2/

Buddhism also arrived in Vietnam about the same time as the Chinese. The Buddhist philosophy taught that man, tempted by greed, suffered as a result of misdeeds in a previous life. Buddhist philosophy taught that this suffering must be stoically endured. Buddhism was thus compatible with the tenets of Confucius; together they created a disposition towards passivism, defeatism, and the maintenance of tradition with close family ties and deference to the ruler. The spread of Taoism, a philosophy which advocated the suppression of individual cares and desires in favor of a spiritual purity and oneness with the universe, further buttressed this Eastern outlook towards life.

This was a period of profound importance in the development of Vietnam's national character. The traditions and values absorbed from the Chinese would long outlive China's direct dominance over her smaller southern neighbor.

The Vietnamese people officially gained independence from China in 939 A.D., and over the next seven centuries gradually expanded southward until they controlled all of what is today considered Vietnam. The passage of time and the effects of this expansion were to bring certain changes in Vietnamese society which influenced its later history. Two of the more important changes were the growth of factionalism and regionalism and the rise in the importance of the village.3/

Regionalism was a consequence of national territorial expansion since difficulties in communication, factional rivalries, and sectional differences eroded the power of the royal authorities and gave opportunities to belligerent local leaders. The major regions will be described in a later section.

Villages were established as the basic administrative unit, with the imperial court exercising control through the village council. 4/ By being responsible for village administration, tax collection, military impressment, and law enforcement, the village council vastly simplified the job of the royal authorities. Villages became autonomous; intra-village ties

became strong; and the village system became entrenched, creating a base for southern expansion. As village populations grew and were unable to expand beyond their bamboo fortifications, small groups would move, and, with imperial permission, form a new village. Strong village ties created great stability, but, especially when coupled with divisive regional ties, they were ultimately to prove detrimental to the organizing efforts of the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies. This was so because of the system's stability and resistance to change, but also in part because of the allies' methods.

By the 18th century the Vietnamese had reached the gulf of Siam and the peak of their power over the various ethnic groups to the south. But the Vietnamese were soon to face an even greater threat to their authority than that from regional warlords: colonialism.

Since the 16th century French Catholic missionaries had been making forays into Southeast Asia. Initially these missionaries came and went, but in the 17th century they came and stayed. Vietnamese officials tried numerous tactics to expel or limit the influence of the missionaries, but these efforts ultimately backfired when court-ordered persecution gave the French an excuse to invade Vietnam in 1857. The conquest had begun.

French rule over Vietnam would bring many changes to Vietnamese society, though perhaps not as many as other colonial powers have brought to their subjects, for, whatever the rhetoric, the French were interested in Vietnam primarily for its economic-exploitation potential. World prestige and an improved military position were nice secondary benefits. The westernization and 'improvement' of the country and its peoples, except where they directly furthered French economic gain, ran a poor third.

A series of Governors General, most notably Paul Doumer and Paul-Armand Rousseau, attempted a series of reforms in what was considered, in potential at least, France's richest colony. But just as other Western powers were never able to open the mythical China market, France was never able to extract riches from Vietnam on the scale which had been prophesized. Much wealth was of course extracted and many fortunes were made,



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but the shortcomings of the reform programs reflect the general misunderstandings and failures of French policies. This is illustrated by the history of Paul Doumer's efforts to reform Vietnam by building a modern railway system.

Paul Doumer was an able, dynamic, hardworking, and honest Governor General.<sup>5/</sup> When he arrived in Vietnam in 1897 for a five-year term of office he carried with him the general if vague support of the French government to 'get things moving'. After almost four decades since the first French attack on Vietnam there was still no prospect of significant utilization of the country's natural resources.<sup>6/</sup> Doumer planned an ambitious program to clear up the colony's administrative chaos and implement a massive economic development plan.<sup>7/</sup> His administrative reforms were actively resisted by the local French colons or businessmen when they threatened to impinge on their profitable domains,<sup>8/</sup> but his economic schemes to develop mines, railroads, bridges, canals, and harbors received more support. Of these the railroad was the only project that was really pushed, and the story of its construction sheds light on many aspects of French-Vietnamese interaction.

Doumer argued that a modern state needed a modern means of transportation as part of the new infrastructure that would soon make the country prosperous. Doumer knew his time was limited, so he planned and started a number of railroad lines almost immediately. Hurried planning resulted in serious miscalculations: engineering errors caused many delays; faulty materials meant constant technical failures; and appalling conditions and the treatment of the 80,000 Vietnamese and Chinese laborers caused 25,000 deaths during the construction of less than 300 miles of the Yunnan-Fou line. The natives were taxed to cover the cost. But as disastrous as these failings were, they were more easily compensated for (native lives being considered expendable) than a much more basic flaw: the railroad was of little economic use. Doumer had failed to recognize that a modern system of transportation--even conceding the dubious contention that Vietnam's limited, poorly constructed system was 'modern'--grafted onto a medieval economy does not necessarily make economic sense.<sup>9/</sup> There has to

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be something to transport. The Vietnamese economy at its stage of development could get next to no use from a railroad; even the French colons could not provide sufficient business to make the line profitable.<sup>10/</sup>

The building of the railroad highlights certain aspects of Vietnamese society and foreign interaction with it: the underestimation of the difficulties involved in bringing about significant change in Vietnam; the brutal disregard for Vietnamese values and lives; and most important, the complete lack of understanding of the situation. The French would not be the last foreign power to misunderstand many aspects of Vietnamese life.<sup>11/</sup>

While various economic changes resulted from French occupation of Vietnam, some of which were certainly significant (e.g., French domination of major economic life and the draining of resources for French benefit), the daily life of the average Vietnamese remained surprisingly unchanged. Taxation was increased, sometimes to oppressive levels, but the most important long-term changes resulting from French rule were not economic.

As noted earlier, regional loyalties and differences had already developed in Vietnam before the arrival of the French. These will be discussed in more detail below, but it is important to note here the effect of the French presence on these factional divisions.

Doumer and other Governors General sometimes experienced great frustration at having to deal with the multiple and confused precincts of authority--the difficulties of accomplishing anything, already significant, were compounded by this diffusion and confusion of authority. But on the whole the French preferred to maintain the existing territorial divisions in accordance with the precept of 'divide and rule.' Even had there been efforts at administrative unity they would have meant little to the average Vietnamese who, if admitted into the bureaucracy, was kept in the lower echelons where few significant administrative procedures were learned. As it was, the French continued, and in some cases strengthened factionalism in Vietnam. More examples will be discussed below.

The area where French rule had its most important effect on the future of Vietnamese society was the nebulous but nevertheless important one of ideas. Education in Vietnam had long been synonymous with memorization of

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Confucian classics. Innovative thinking and practices were not compatible with Confucian traditions. The French brought new ideas and methods, and while education of the Vietnamese was in fact exceedingly limited and carefully controlled (with emphasis on French and other skills useful for the bureaucracy), many new ideas inevitably seeped through to the elite, and especially the educated elite, of Vietnamese society. The birth of indigenous political parties was one important result.<sup>12/</sup>

The presence of the French and the hardships suffered by the Vietnamese as a result, caused natural resentments. Western political parties, Marxist ideology, and other similar organizations and ideas suggested a way out. The Japanese success against the Russians in 1905 gave hope. A movement in exile led by Phan Boi Chau and Prince Cuong De sprang up which aimed at expelling the French, restoring the monarchy, and modernizing Vietnam. Over the first few decades of the twentieth century numerous nationalist groups emerged: the Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi in 1911, the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) in 1927, the religious/political Cao Dai in 1926 and Hoa Hao in 1933, the Indochina Communist Party in 1930, the Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang in 1940, and so on. All shared the goal of expelling the French; other details differed. The existence of a common 'enemy' helped lend coherence to the groups and was probably of immeasurable importance in helping them gain support. The degree to which the opposing sides in the coming war would be able to claim to fight against a common foreign enemy would tell greatly on their success.

The French helped further stratify and confuse Vietnamese society. The Vietnamese bureaucrats were torn between French and native loyalties. A new soldier class was created. For the first time some merchants were considered higher on the social ladder than farmers. Scholars still retained high prestige but true scholarship and competitive examinations were gradually replaced by ticket-punchers needing relatively low-quality diplomas for civil service work.

The French introduced another element into Vietnamese society which proved to be truly divisive: Christianity. Some of the religious/political in-fighting which so hamstrung successive Vietnamese governments

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possibly would not have occurred without the introduction and growing strength of Catholicism. As discussed further in a later section, religious conflict was not limited to the theological sphere; it rapidly took on regional, political, and social dimensions. Its importance as a focus of discord must not be undervalued.

The elements of unity and disunity inherent in Vietnamese society will be discussed in more detail in the next two sections, but a summary of the effects of the French presence on Vietnamese society is appropriate here. As noted above, the French did bring with them various economic improvements and projects, though the village life of the average Vietnamese remained to a large extent intact. Numerous administrative reforms were brought about. Various administrative structures survived the French departure and provided a framework for the nascent Vietnamese government. But equally important administratively, the Vietnamese were denied the more important positions in the civilian and military organizations, and thus failed to gain the necessary experience to take over the important positions vacated by the French.

The French presence furthered regional, social, and religious divisions. Numerous regional divisions existed, with an official geographical separation being created by the 1954 Geneva Agreements. Social and religious differences, on the other hand, would prove to be significant barriers to the national unification necessary to fight a formidable enemy. What is more, Western ideas brought by the French provided a seedbed from which indigenous political parties would grow, fertilized by anti-French sentiment.

The precipitate French withdrawal left the loyal population of the Red River and the remote loyal Catholic dioceses of Phat Diem and Bui Chu exposed and unprotected.<sup>13/</sup> Trust in the sincerity and staying power of a foreign nation would be hard to restore. The speed of the French withdrawal furthered the chaos of the time, resulting, for example, in the movement of 900,000 refugees from the north to the south and the frequent destruction of local ties. Given the importance these ties held in traditional Vietnamese life, and given the many new problems created by the

existence of refugee groups, this must be counted among the significant results of the French presence in Vietnam.

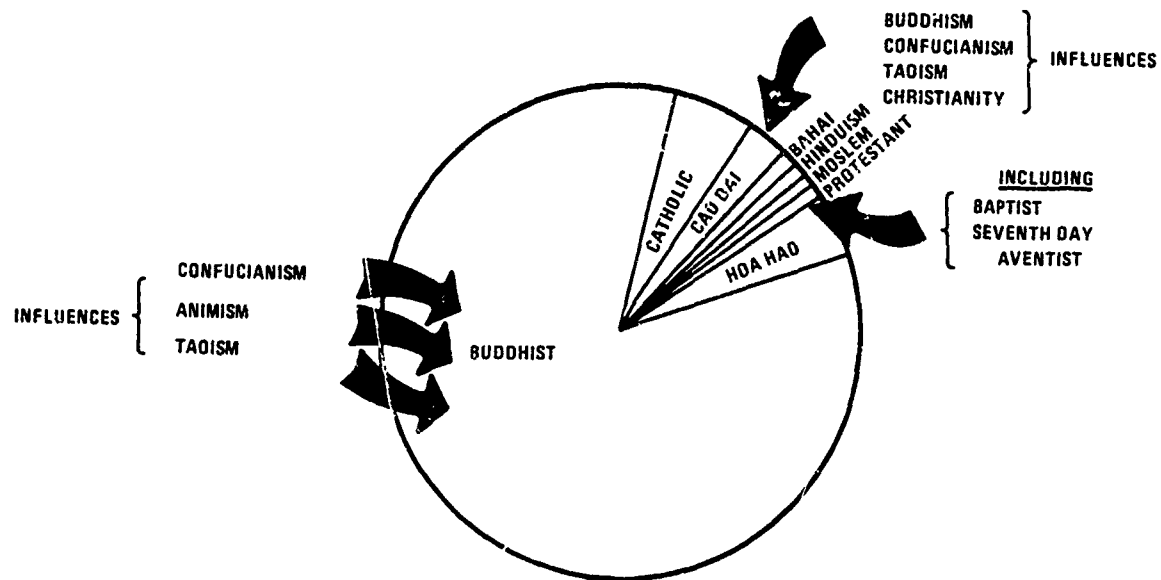
B. BASES FOR UNITY INHERENT IN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY AT THE TIME OF THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL

Despite the long presence and chaotic withdrawal of the French,<sup>14</sup> certain elements conducive to the creation of a united South Vietnamese nation capable of supporting a strong government and respectable military establishment were present.

When South Vietnam was born as a nation south of the demilitarized zone it had a potentially strong anticommunist base. There were about 900,000 anticommunist refugees from the north, over 3 million strong anti-communist Cao Dai and Hoa Hao adherents, a sizable bloc of Catholics, an urban middle class with interests incompatible with communism, and a rural peasantry which, being basically uninterested in larger political questions except where it was directly affected, provided a pool of potential anti-communists. (See Figure 1-1)

The traditional religions and philosophies also worked to strengthen the new South Vietnamese nation. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are not as divisive and exclusive as various Western religious denominations: indeed, Cao Dai was a blend of the views of these groups. Taken together, the tenets of Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Tsu provided a traditional world-view conducive to a strong national government not particularly favorable to communism. Confucianism, for example, emphasized deference to authority, while Buddhism provided a philosophic framework for enduring the suffering brought about by sacrifice and war.

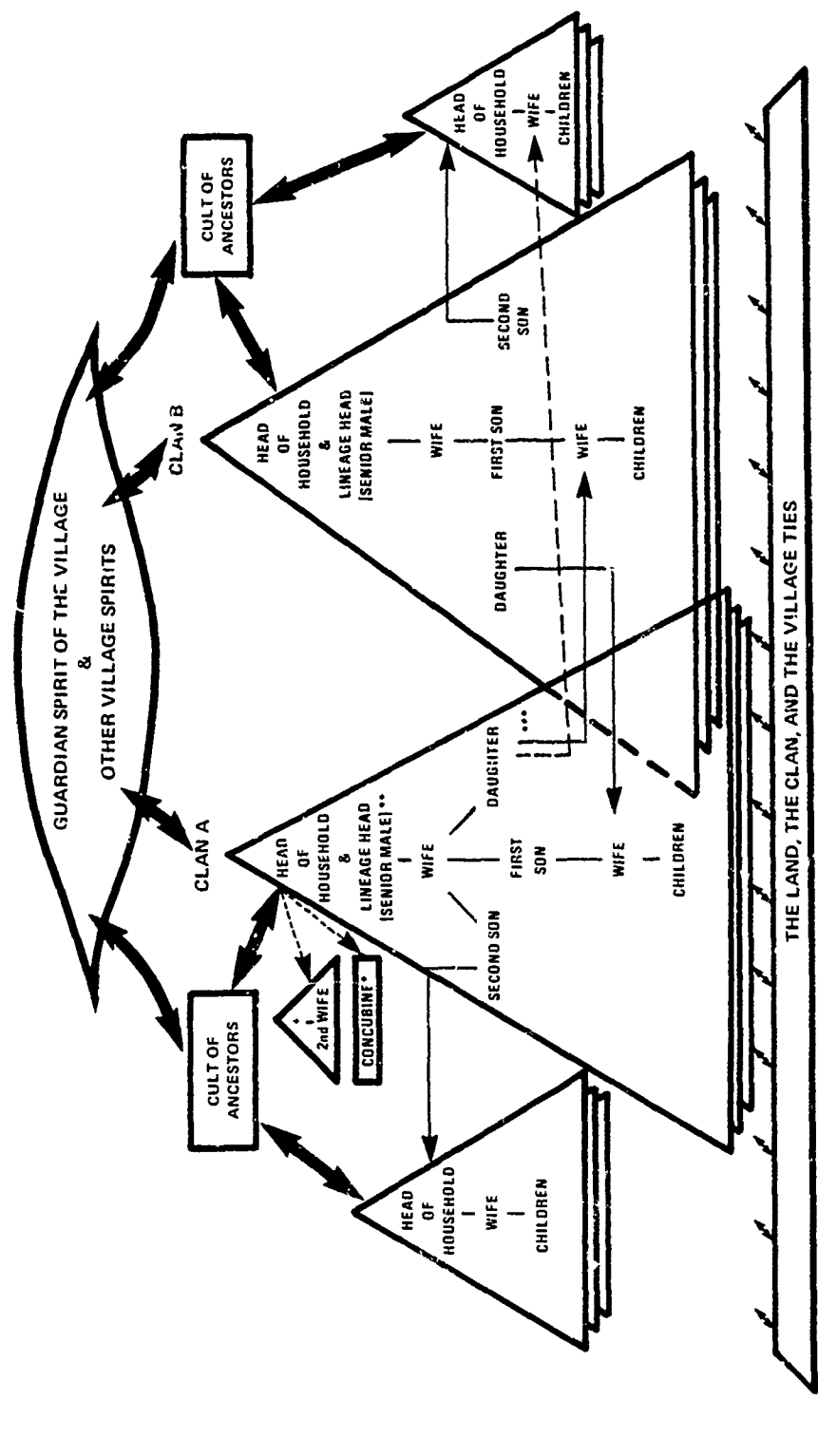
Strong village ties had been only partially eroded by the French, and the village could still be looked upon as a stable and logical basic administrative unit. Villagers were used to heavy taxation meted out by the French. Tradition countenanced the practice of village councils looking after village needs while providing taxes and men for the government, an arrangement giving the councils a free hand within wide areas of decision making, but also freeing the government from many burdens. (Figure 1-2)



4541/78W

SOURCE: Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, The South Vietnamese Society, Indochinese Refugee Authored Monograph; and Harvey Smith, et al., Area Handbook for South Vietnam

Figure 1-1. Approximate Distribution of Religious Groups in South Vietnam With Respective Influences



- NOTES.
- - - - - ALTHOUGH OUTLAWED IN 1959 SOME FAMILY HEADS CONTINUE TO TAKE A 2nd WIFE OR CONCUBINE
  - .. .. MOST OFTEN THE PATRIARCH SERVES AS THE HOUSEHOLD HEAD & PATRILINEAL LINEAGE IS OBSERVED HOWEVER SOME GROUPS, SUCH AS THE RHODE SUB GROUP OF THE MONTAGNARDS, FOLLOWS MATRILINEAL LINEAGE WITH THE MATRIARCH AT THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY
  - ... .. POSSIBLE MARITAL MATCHES

SOURCE: BDM Analysis

Figure 1-2. Example of Traditional Relationships Between the Village, Clan and the Extended Family Most Common in the Rural Areas of South Vietnam

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Another strong unifying force in Vietnamese politics, both in the North and the South, was the Vietnamese sense of ethnic identity. Nearly 80% of the population were ethnic Vietnamese who had a tradition of ethnic unity stemming from their long period of independence, the successful expansion southward, and the majority's common dislike for the French. Ethnic identity was only translated into a spirit of nationalism--a very Western concept--with the coming of the French. It remained a powerful unifying force and source of nationalist vigor after the French left, and was recognized and exploited as such by the communists. Although many anti-French nationalist parties had sprung up under French rule, encouraged by the Japanese example, only the Indochinese Communist Party survived the subsequent political in-fighting and the failure of the nationalist insurrection at Yen Bay in 1930.

The South had a stronger economy than the North. It had a large food surplus potential. The rubber plantations were largely undamaged during the war and rubber continued to be the major export. And there was land. This point can hardly be over-emphasized: the Viet Minh counted on the dissatisfaction of the people to make possible winning them over with promises of a better life under communism. With its land South Vietnam had the potential of producing a large class of satisfied owners unwilling to give up their stake in the society and lacking the motivation to support a peoples' revolution. But recultivation of abandoned lands and redistribution were urgently needed. In the Mekong Delta region for example, where the vast majority of South Vietnam's peasantry lived "2.5 percent of the landlords owned half the cultivated land and 80% of the land was tilled by tenant farmers.." <sup>15/</sup> As Buttinger observed:

What makes this story, which for many years was expected to have a happy ending, so tragic is that not only did the prospects for building a viable South Vietnam, for breaking the hold of the Communists on the people, and for avoiding another dreadful war exist, but they were in fact excellent. Despite the ravages of the war and the problems created for the South's economy through partition of the country and withdrawal of the Expeditionary Corps, the South was economically in better shape than the North. <sup>16/</sup>



But the land transfer program instituted by Diem proved to be inadequate at best, and later programs came too late.<sup>17/</sup>

In 1954 then, the government was faced with building a viable nationalistic mission; the former's success hinged on the success of the latter. A series of important elements were present which could be tapped for nation-building, but they would need to be tapped vigorously, for serious divisive elements were also present.

### C. BASES FOR DISUNITY INHERENT IN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY

As mentioned earlier, regional differences grew in importance during Vietnam's long period of independence and were exacerbated by the French.

Vietnam embraced three distinct regions: Tonkin in the north, Annam in the center, and Cochinchina in the south.<sup>18/</sup> Each developed distinctive individual cultural, economic, and political characteristics. Economically, Tonkin had a natural affinity for industrialization, as a result of its endowment with mineral and hydro-electric power resources. In contrast, the south and central regions contained far greater agricultural--basically rice producing--areas. Prior to World War II, the southern region exported rice to the north.

There are also subtle, but nevertheless significant differences among the regions in their religious attitudes and practices. The five northern provinces of South Vietnam (Annam) contain the most devout, traditionalist Buddhists. This is attributable to the fact that Hue was for many centuries both the imperial capital and the seat of learning and classical culture. It is not surprising, therefore, that the focal point of Buddhist dissent against the Diem regime in 1963 was at Hue, the residence of Thich Tri Quang, its spiritual leader.

Advocates of traditional culture and Confucian ethics were generally found in the northern provinces of Annam in an area to which populations from Tonkin and the Chinese frontier migrated. Tonkin, close by the Chinese frontier, is the center of Confucian "orthodoxy". The introduction of Roman Catholicism by the French thus was easier in the south than in any

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other region of Vietnam, a critical factor in the contest for political power during and after the Diem regime.

In order to understand the underlying causes for regional conflicts and animosities that ultimately played such a critical role in South Vietnam's failure to achieve national unity, it is useful to examine the perceptions individuals of each region had for the others. Pike, 19/ notes the following:

- (1) "The Northerner sees himself as modern, progressive, scientific-minded, and efficient. He sees the Southerner as lazy, dirty, lethargic, perhaps even dull-witted. The Centeric is considered snobbish, tradition-bound, overly concerned with a remote and largely unimportant past."
- (2) "The Centeric sees himself as the only truly educated person in Vietnam, the inheritor and protector of a great intellectual and aesthetic tradition, which Northerners and Southerners are able neither to understand nor appreciate. He regards the Northerner as grasping, money-hungry and overly sharp in business deals. The Southerner he sees as boorish, rustic, and unintellectual."
- (3) "The Southerner regards himself as pacifistic, in harmony with nature in a pastoral sense. Southerners think nothing of spending a Sunday afternoon meditating on a hillside, a pastime that strikes the Northerner as a waste of time and the Centeric as faintly ridiculous. The Southerner strongly regards the Northerner as hot-tempered, aggressive, and war-like. It is not uncommon to encounter, in Saigon, a Southerner who tells you the Viet Minh war was unnecessary, that it was started and pursued by the hot-headed Northerners, who if they had only had the patience of the Southerners, would have seen the French leave Indochina and the British leave India. The Centeric is regarded as a person preoccupied with political intrigue, often for its own sake, circuitous and ambiguous in speech and deed."

Some had hoped that the dominance of the military in government after the fall of Diem would help erase regional discriminatory practices, since

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the RVNAF was looked on as a melting pot for religious and regional differences. This was not to be.

Other religious and political groups suffered from regional divisions as well.<sup>20/</sup> The Buddhists' ranks were split into the militant Annam-centered An Quang group and the more moderate northern-based Vien Hoa Dao faction. The Dai Viet party was split into central and southern branches, and the VNQDD into northern, central and southern branches. No leader was strong or popular enough to unify his party or other group across regional lines for any significant period of time. The exodus of about 900,000 northerners intensified the regional bigotry problem in the south and indicated the extent of class stratification and conflict in the north.<sup>21/</sup>

A vicious circle arose. Government leaders had to appoint members of their own family or section because of very real dangers from coups, traitors, and general chaos, but any such narrowly based government proved unable to face the problems which created this situation and unable to endure with such a small base of support.<sup>22/</sup> There were of course exceptions; certain individuals were able to command power in regions other than their own or hold national office under a regime controlled by a region not their own. But they were not powerful enough to have a significant impact on the regional rivalry in South Vietnam. Regional rivalries remained strong and helped to poison the RVN's various attempts at unification.

Religion proved to be another barrier to national consensus. Though Vietnam was the home of many religions/philosophies they were not mutually antagonistic to any particular extent before the arrival of Christian missionaries; indeed, as has been seen, they together made up a sort of national ethic, and were even successfully combined in Cao Dai. But with the growing support of catholicism and the increasing politicization and factionalization of religious life in Vietnam, religious groups became more antagonistic.

The figures do not reflect the situation accurately: 80% of the Vietnamese population claimed to be Buddhists and 10% claimed to be Catholic. This would seem to indicate that whatever differences there

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were, they would not be of critical importance, as the Buddhist position would easily prevail. But if the language can be so abused, it was a 'small 80%' and a 'strong 10%': some who claimed Buddhist allegiance were no more committed than Easter-and-Christmas church-going Christians.

In order to evaluate the impact that Catholicism had on South Vietnamese society, it is necessary to recognize that its introduction was a direct product of French rule. Ultimately, only 10% of the South Vietnamese population had been converted to Catholicism, though the converts did include Diem. Diem's oldest brother, Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc was the senior prelate in South Vietnam, and as the oldest brother, held considerable sway in the family. Archbishop Thuc helped initiate a number of the First Republic's measures, including the Strategic Hamlets program. Catholics had relatively easy access to government favors. Due to this relationship, and because of the church's minority position, Diem's pro-Catholic posture aroused the resentment of Vietnam's predominately Buddhist population, as well as those who resented French influence. Government positions were granted to Catholics considerably out of proportion to their numerical strength. The influx of Catholic refugees from the North put an additional strain on the already overcrowded cities, many of which were suffering from acute unemployment. In time, a large portion of these refugees were resettled in Catholic villages; as a result, they had little opportunity for interaction with the Buddhist community.

Government-sponsored separation, coupled with Diem's pro-Catholic leanings, exacerbated relations between the Catholic and Buddhist communities. To appreciate Diem's position, it is important to recall the Catholic community's condemnation of communism in 1951. Diem, in his attempt to create a viable government, was prompted to utilize those members of society who were avowedly loyal and anticommunist.<sup>24/</sup> And, although the Catholic community was often at odds concerning Diem's political courtship of Catholicism, it is certain that Diem's demise was regarded by the Catholics as threatening to their interests. His demise only served further to divide the Catholic and Buddhist communities. After Diem, the Buddhist community continued to express anti-Catholic sentiments,

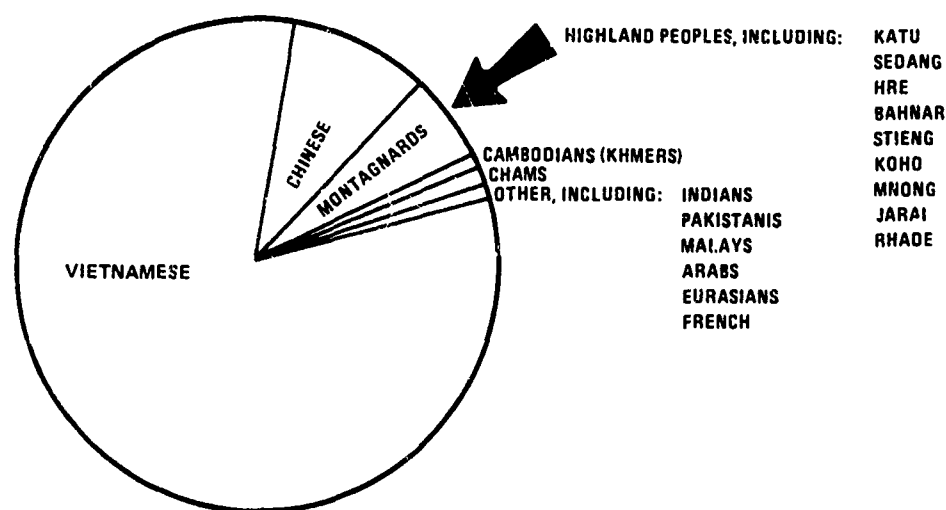
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prompting the Catholic community to conclude religious discrimination was in the offing.

Throughout the mid-sixties, violent exchanges occurred between the two communities. In rapid succession, pro-Catholic and pro-Buddhist regimes were toppled, adding to public confusion and uncertainty. Buddhist radicalization was an understandable response to years of having been dominated. It is within this context that the outgrowth of religious rivalry in South Vietnamese society may be understood. While US support of Diem 25/ and successive regimes was consonant with the desire to create and support a stable South Vietnamese government, US support for these regimes, especially those professing a pro-Catholic inclination, only succeeded in engendering a more hostile response to the US presence.

The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao played important roles for a time in Vietnamese politics and society. The Cao Dai, as previously alluded to, believed in a synthesis of the tenets of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity. The Cao Dai were anti-French and friendly towards the Japanese. The Hoa Hao sect practiced a simplified version of Buddhism. They too were pro-Japanese and anti-French. Both sects were instrumental in assisting Diem in the General Hinh affair.26/ General Hinh held the top position in the National Army and had numerous important French connections and pro-French feelings. He had to be removed if Diem's government was to have a prayer of a chance to lead a truly Vietnamese government. General Hinh was very powerful, and the crisis was very real. But Diem was able to rally the support of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao leaders, and the Cao Dai provided its troops as backing. Hinh was removed. The government was able to make a start.27/ But the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao did not give unconditional government support. Their feudal armies controlled large parts of the countryside. Diem next turned his attention to them, and was fairly successful in turning factions of the groups against each other until he could control them all.28/ All this took time and energies that could not then be spent on building a strong country.

As if regional and religious differences were not enough, South Vietnam was further divided by various ethnic, class and linguistic differences. (See Figure 1-3)



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SOURCES: Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, The South Vietnamese Society, Indochinese Refugee Authored Monograph; and Harvey Smith, et al., Area Handbook for South Vietnam

Figure 1-3. Approximate Breakdown of Ethnic Group Composition in South Vietnamese Society




The Chinese formed Vietnam's largest minority. They lived primarily in the cities and tended to be engaged in commerce, real estate and other trading ventures. Many of the successful businessmen were Chinese. The Chinese were held in awe by some, and viewed with suspicion and envy by others. In the fifties the indigenous Chinese enjoyed special privileges, and with French assistance had little difficulty in securing for themselves positions within the bureaucracy. However, this period was relatively short-lived; in 1956 the government issued two decrees that had a profoundly adverse impact on the Chinese. The first called for all foreign nationals to declare themselves as either citizens of South Vietnam or as foreign residents. The second decree barred foreigners from some eleven occupations, all of which had hitherto been dominated by the Chinese. The Chinese reacted with hostility to this "choose or starve" approach. But most of the Chinese chose to become Vietnamese citizens. While a certain amount of hostility remained, the problem ceased to be pressing. Here again, though, energy had to be spent caring for internal disorders rather than combatting the insurgency threat.

While the Chinese "problem" was of considerable concern to the South Vietnamese government, the Montagnard question was far more perplexing.<sup>30/</sup> The highland Montagnard peoples consisted of over 30 tribes scattered over the central highlands of South Vietnam, an area of utmost importance to Saigon both economically and strategically. Historically, the highlands have served as a buffer zone in periods of conflict between Vietnam and its neighbors. During the Vietnam war the Montagnards' highland home assumed even greater strategic significance. However, the relationship was one of mutual antagonism. (See Map 1-1)



Tension between the Montagnard and Vietnamese communities was the product of a French policy designed to drive a wedge between the Montagnards and the lowlanders and keep the mountain plantations in French hands, Montagnard resistance to the government's minority policies, and traditional Vietnamese disdain for Montagnard backwardness. During Diem's tenure several provocative policies were introduced. For example, Vietnamese citizens were resettled in the highland areas to promote ethnic

# ETHNIC GROUPS




## AUSTROASIATIC

-  VIETNAMESE
-  MON-KHMER (CAMBODIAN)
-  MON-KHMER (TRIBAL GROUPS)

## MALAYO-POLYNESIAN

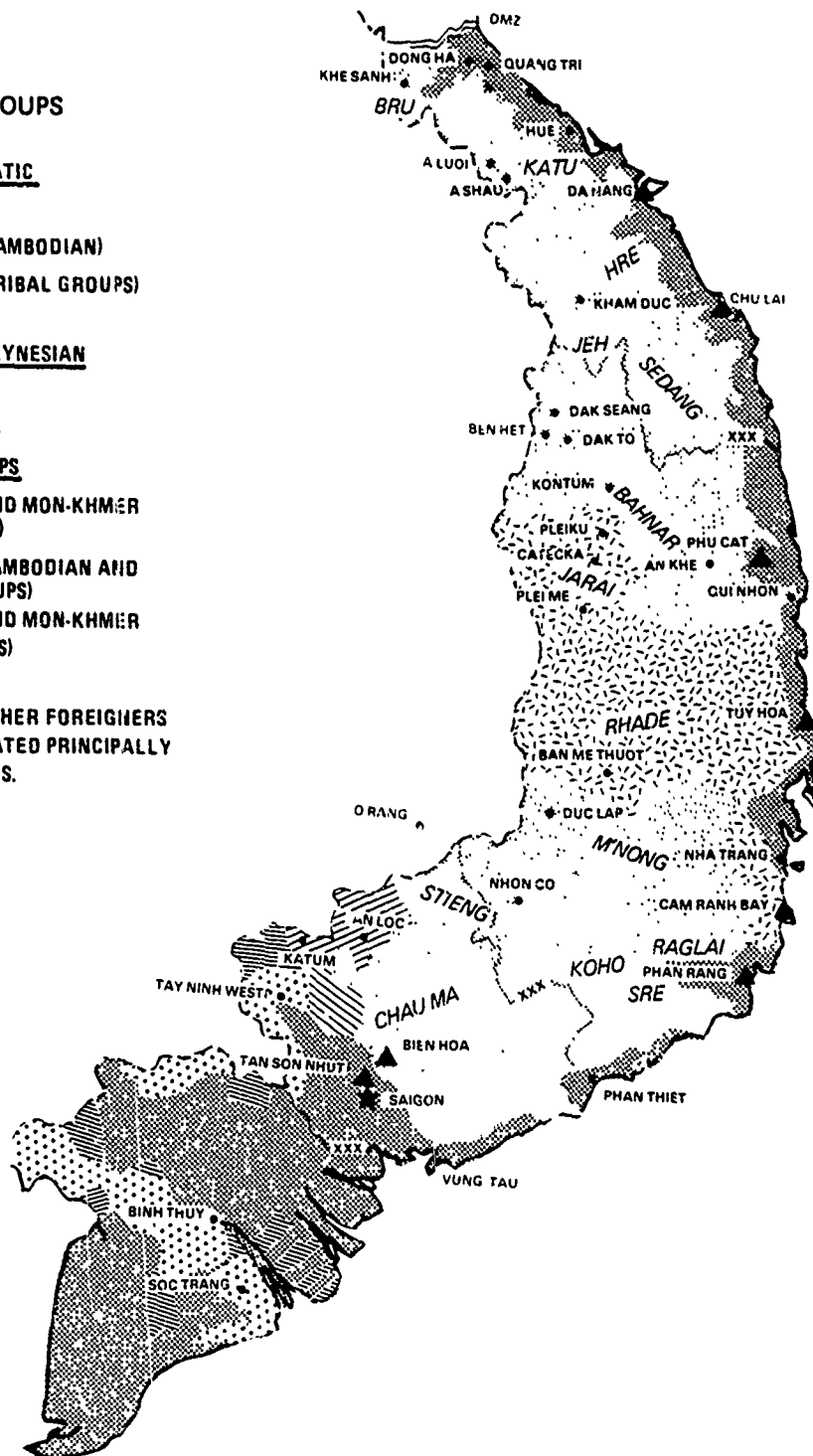
-  CHAM
-  TRIBAL GROUPS

## MIXED GROUPS

-  VIETNAMESE AND MON-KHMER (CAMBODIAN)
-  MON-KHMER (CAMBODIAN AND TRIBAL GROUPS)
-  VIETNAMESE AND MON-KHMER (TRIBAL GROUPS)

HRE TRIBAL NAME

NOTE: CHINESE AND OTHER FOREIGNERS ARE CONCENTRATED PRINCIPALLY IN LARGER CITIES.



4541/78W

SOURCE: Extract from CIA Map #500 874572

Map 1-1. Ethnic Group Locations in South Vietnamese Society



integration and assure the security of the area. However the majority of resettled Vietnamese felt only disdain for the Montagnard inhabitants, expressing their disapprobation by belittling the backward state of Montagnard development and abstaining from interaction by refusing to learn any of the various Montagnard languages. The Montagnard community, no less antagonistic to the Vietnamese, regarded this encroachment on their territory with suspicion and resentment. A Montagnard autonomy movement sprang up in 1958. The 1964 inception of the FULRO Movement (Front Unifie pour la Liberation des Races Opprimees, or Unified Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races) and the involvement of US Special Forces with the Montagnards developed in response to this situation. Rallying around the call for Montagnard autonomy, this group generated considerable consternation in government ranks with its uprising at Ban Me Thout in September 1964. After negotiating the release of the American and other hostages Prime Minister Khanh made some concessions to the Montagnards, while refusing their demand for autonomous government. Minor incidents continued. When Generals Thieu and Ky came to power a series of Montagnard requests were granted. Things were not always well handled. Incidents continued as the Montagnards learned to play the promises of the RVN against the communists. The Viet Minh and the National Liberation Front were quick to exploit Montagnard disaffection. In this way, partly as a result of the government's policies, the Montagnard community, though not really politically inclined, became politicized and was often compelled to embrace the anti-GVN doctrines of the NLF/VC. Here, then, was another obstacle to South Vietnamese solidarity.

At the same time as these problems were arising, the urban-rural schism was developing into a chasm. Urban areas consume the food produced in rural areas. Thus the former demand low food prices while the latter demand high prices for their products. During the period of acute inflation beginning in mid-1964 and continuing through 1965 the demand for low food prices produced serious urban and rural unrest, a situation exploited by the communists by offering higher prices for their products than those officially established by the government. Many of the peasants felt they

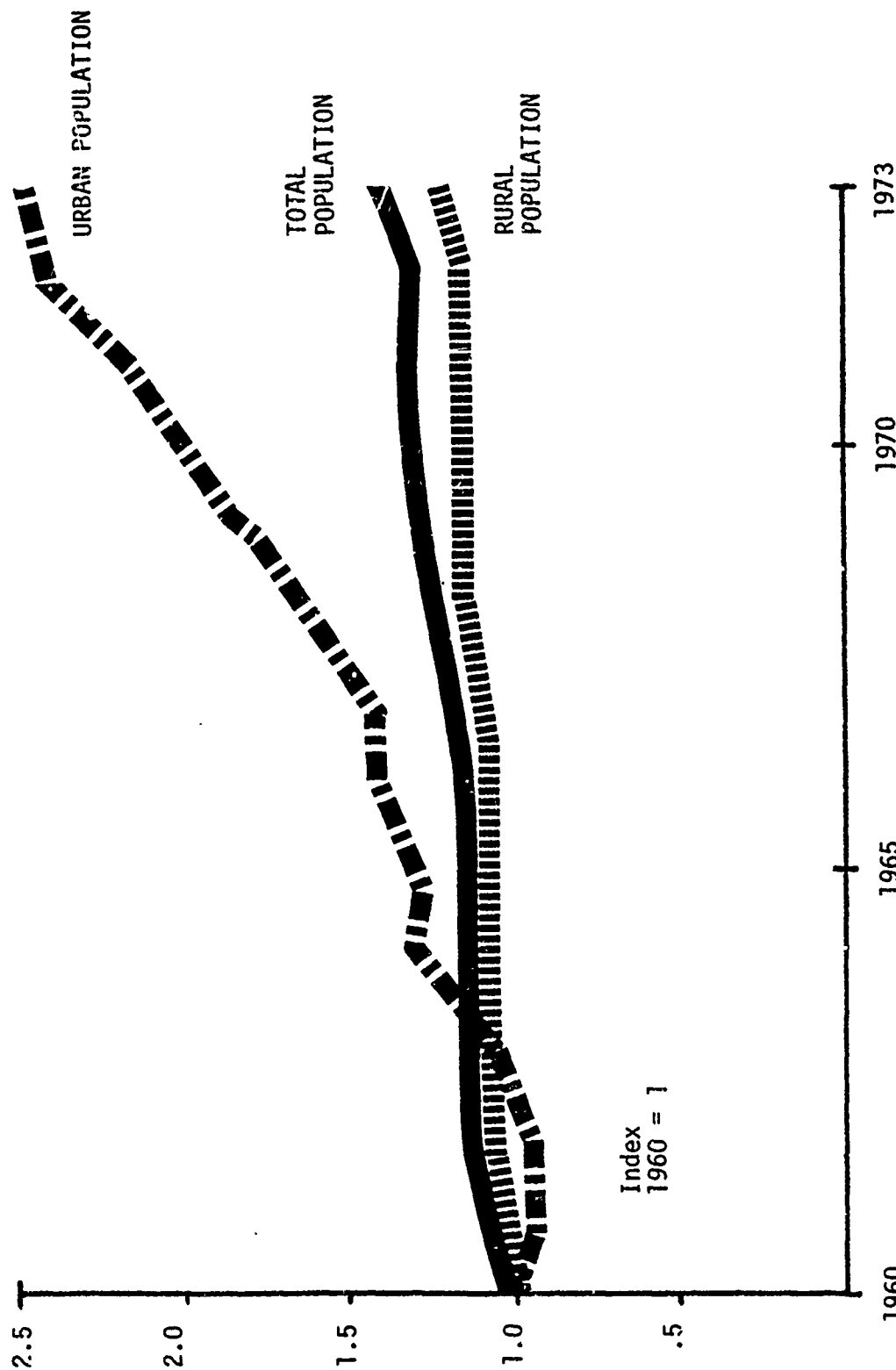
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were not understood by the government and that the government was disposed to satisfying the needs of the city inhabitants at their expense. Much of this rural mistrust was well founded.

Contributing to urban-rural differences was the great influx of refugees from the North and from the countryside into Saigon and other urban centers. Approximately 900,000 refugees, mostly Catholics from the metropolitan areas of Hanoi and Haiphong migrated south during 1954 and 1955. Most of these refugees were settled in villages and in Saigon, and by 1963 were relatively self-supporting. Increased military activities in the Delta region and the area surrounding Saigon in 1965 and 1966 forced many of these refugees to flee the rural villages and settle in Saigon, causing great social tension and fresh demands on the national and municipal governments for their care and support. This return to Saigon contributed significantly to pressures to secure already scarce food stocks at low prices, despite the fact that Saigon was in the throes of uncontrolled inflation.

The growth rates of both urban and rural populations in comparison with the total South Vietnamese population from 1960 to 1973 were skewed as well. The urban growth increased by a factor of nearly 2.5 during the 13-year period shown in the figure. A large portion of this increase was due to the great influx of refugees into Saigon and the coastal cities resulting from the Tet offensive and from increased guerrilla activity in the rural areas. In contrast, the rural population trend during these years shows little or no increase. (See Figure 1-4)

Other factors furthered the urban-rural antagonism.<sup>31/</sup> The rural population tended to resent the westernization and perceived moral degradation of the cities. A continuous stream of refugees totalling 20% of the population strained urban resources. The cities were swelled by a growing middle class, part of which staffed the growing government bureaucracy; at the same time the rural areas became less and less able to produce enough food for them as displacement and losses due to the war cut into production.



SOURCE: BDM Analysis

Figure 1-4. Index of Population Growth

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Class stratification grew. The urban poor and urban middle class became more distinct groups. The rural poor, totalling half of the entire population, became more disgruntled as the war caused hardships and the government caused problems. The growing power of the small urban elite almost certainly caused further tensions. (See Figure 1-5)

Regional, religious, ethnic, urban-rural, and social divisions were made worse by Vietnamese factionalism: the attitude that considers the group, whether it be the family, clique or party, more important than the whole. Years of suffering and mistreatment can understandably produce such insular loyalties in self defense; they cannot easily be removed.<sup>32/</sup>

To top it all off, South Vietnam was riddled with political divisions. When Diem came to power he faced serious political opposition from many quarters. The Army had pro-French leaders. The police were controlled by the Binh Xuyen bandits. The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao had their own armies to back their demands. The French still controlled significant aspects of the business community. There were numerous political parties unwilling to come to a working agreement with the government. Diem successfully neutralized the powers of the emperor Bao Dai; he now had to contend with the political turbulence. Two and a half months after the coup that removed him it was estimated that the RVN had no fewer than 62 political groups. These proved divisive without being constructive--real power had eventually been secured by Diem and the parties remained only as a front camouflaging one-party rule. After Diem more serious political fragmentation resurfaced. General Khanh tried to free himself from the political turmoil, but failed. By the time Generals Thieu and Ky came to power there were over 100 political parties. Even the main parties could not hold together--the Dai Viet had three branches as did the VQDD--and rivalry was even more common on the local level.

In 1972 Thieu, hoping to impose some order over this political chaos decreed that parties had to meet certain requirements to be legal. Only three parties met the requirements, but by this time other problems such as those discussed above had developed into such crisis situations that the Political Parties Law did little to restore stability, and was in many

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ELITE	MIDDLE CLASS	RURAL POOR	CITY POOR
BEFORE FRENCH OCCUPATION			
I. THE ROYAL FAMILY II. MANDARINATE-HIGHLY SELECT CLASSICAL SCHOLARS-HELD POLITICAL AND SOCIAL POWER III. LANDED WEALTH	CHINESE - CONTROLLING LIMITED FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC TRADE	FARMERS FISHERMEN	UNSKILLED LABOR
DURING FRENCH OCCUPATION			
I. ROYAL FAMILY-DECLINED-HUE II. FOREIGN POWER STRUCTURE III. VIETNAMESE-NEW WESTERN EDUCATIONS -ECONOMIC POWER FROM LAND (*IMPT. NOTE-ONLY UNIVERSITY IN HANOI- FOR FUTURE REGIONAL POWER BIAS)	I. SELF-EMPLOYED-URBAN II. SALARIED PEOPLE WITH SOME EDUCATION-NEW FRENCH TYPE ADMINISTRATORS III. CHINESE-CONTROLLING STRICTLY	AGRICULTURAL AND PLAN- TATION WAGE WORKERS (RUBBER, RICE, COFFEE, TEA) (MOSTLY IN COCHIN CHINA)	WAGE WORKERS INVOLVED IN MINING, TRANSPORTATION, TEXTILE MILLS & CEMENT FACTORIES (MORE IN NORTH)
POST WORLD WAR II (1945-1960)			
I. GOVERNMENT SERVICE PROFESSIONALS II. OWNERS OF LARGE ESTATES & BUSINESSES III. RELIGIOUS LEADERS	SAME	SAME	SHOP KEEPERS, PERSONAL SERVICE OCCUPATIONS WAGE WORKERS
RECENT PERIOD 1960 - 1975			
I. VIETNAMESE FROM IN & ANNAM-HOLDING POLITICAL POWER II. BANKING & FINANCE III. HIGH RANKING MILITARY IV. RELIGIOUS LEADERS	I. CIVIL SERVANTS II. LOW-RANKING MILITARY III. BUSINESS EMPLOYERS, TEACHERS, MANAGEMENT, FARM & IV. FACTORY-MANAGEMENT	SAME	SHOPKEEPERS, PERSONAL SERVICE OCCUPATIONS WAGE WORKERS (UNSKILLED- UNEDUCATED) TAXI DRIVERS, PEDDLERS FORTUNE-TELLERS, STEVEDORES, DOMESTIC SERVANTS

SOURCE: BDM Analysis  
Figure 1-5. Evolution of the Vietnamese Social Structure

important ways irrelevant to the political process: true party politics, where major parties have a reasonable chance of winning power by democratic or similar means did not exist in Vietnam. In a way then, it is a misnomer to call these groups political parties. A description of the Personalist Labor Party illustrates this:

The Personalist Labor Party, headed by the President's brother and Chief Advisor Ngo Dinh Nhu, was widely regarded as the Southern counterpart of the Communist Party in the North. But unlike the Communist Party, about which there was surely never anything artificial, the Personalist Labor Party was not the organizational expression of conscious political aspirations either by the masses or by an avant-garde. Although created for the defense of the Diem government, the party's aims were not pursued through organization and propaganda. Its chief activity was to spy on enemies of the regime and to discover and denounce defectors. Membership was restricted, consisting almost exclusively of civil servants in key positions. All its activities were conducted amid secrecy. The Personalist Labor Party never held a convention, never took a public stand on any issue, and its governing body never met as a group. The party was run by Nhu alone.<sup>33/</sup>

Thus political parties provided focus for dissent without providing constructive input for the South Vietnamese political system.

#### D. AMERICAN IMPACT ON VIETNAMESE SOCIETY

Americans came to South Vietnam in a trickle of advisers and aid; their numbers would swell to over half a million in a country of only 16 million. Given the instability and vulnerability of Vietnamese society and the demands of the task facing the allies it can hardly be surprising that the American presence had a significant impact on Vietnamese life.

Broadly speaking the US in Vietnam sought to improve and supplement Vietnam's military strength, to further the establishment of a Vietnamese democratic state and to modernize the Vietnamese economy in the process. All three, almost by definition would substantially change Vietnamese society.

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Many Western improvements were realized--more during the US's short presence than during the long French tenure. Road improvement was accomplished on a dramatic scale, transforming a country with modest, often seasonally passable roads and tracks into one with an extensive network of all-weather asphalt and macadam-surfaced roads. Seaports were dramatically upgraded. A fleet of motorboats made river transportation more efficient. New airfields were built and old ones improved. Hardstand heliports were constructed. The introduction of a new kind of rice and improved farming techniques increased yields in some areas; spraying of defoliants denuded others. The improved transportation system, coupled with American aid and methods, improved the quality of the health care available to the average citizen.

In addition, the manpower drain brought about the demands of the war, the parallel growth of bureaucracies, and the growing refugee problem meant that women had increasingly to take over jobs formerly filled by men. Though bringing with it obvious advantages, this created untold strains on traditional Vietnamese life. Indeed, similar problems would face Vietnamese refugees in the US after the war--necessity forcing the women to work--causing serious marital and emotional problems as reflected in an upward spiralling divorce rate. The increasing demand for working women was fueled by the numerous US economic programs in Vietnam.

It becomes clear, viewing these programs as a whole, that they represented and produced some major changes for Vietnam. Unlike Doumer's railroad-to-nowhere, their impact was far-reaching and profound. Further, these more tangible changes brought by the Americans were only one side of the many-faceted impact of US money, military means, men, methods and mores on Vietnamese society.

Perhaps the least tangible but most important variable affecting the American impact on Vietnamese society can be summarized as cultural differences coupled with cultural ignorance.<sup>35/</sup> It was and is easy and tempting for Americans to view South Vietnam and other emerging countries as instant replays of the American revolution, to see them as groups of

determined, freedom-loving peoples with Western democratic values struggling to throw off the yolk of an oppressor (especially a subhuman communist oppressor) welcoming the aid of a like-minded friend. This view is not necessarily inaccurate, however it is equally not always and/or not completely correct, and to the extent that cultural misinterpretation and ignorance exist, mutual and separate aims may be frustrated. Vietnam provides a shining example. As Buttinger observed, there was no "free" Vietnam. It had to be created. This, in spite of those for whom anti-Communism was synonymous with freedom, was the understanding of the American people. They would not have supported their government's policy of aiding South Vietnam after 1954 had they foreseen that the country, ruled by brutal and sterile dictatorships, could survive only if the United States went to war.36/

It is as difficult to write fairly about cultural differences as it is to pin them down. Words used in the opening section of this chapter to describe the values of traditional Vietnamese society such as passivism, defeatism, deference to authority, exclusive village ties, even tradition, often have negative connotations in American English. It is important when discussing these values to remember that they often are as acceptable to, and revered by many Vietnamese as freedom, private enterprise and the independence of the individual are to many Americans. To understand the Vietnamese situation regarding cultural conflict it may be useful to reverse the situation and picture a well-meaning more powerful ally giving aid to the US and in the process both inadvertantly and purposefully imposing its very different methods and value system on us. The displeasure and confusion can be easily imagined.

In the context of Vietnamese traditional history, as outlined above, Western intervention was a very recent phenomenon. The firmly entrenched Confucian-Buddhist-Chinese value system was only somewhat weakened by the French presence. The Americans presented a more striking challenge. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of American society, and Vietnamese society has been only briefly described; nevertheless certain general areas of cultural conflict have, at least with hindsight become obvious. Allowance for overgeneralization must be made in the interest of brevity.



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In certain spheres American values are almost the converse of Vietnamese. While the former often value the abolition of tradition in the interest of progress and the independence and social mobility of the individual, the Vietnamese tend to value the maintenance of tradition, family ties and village and ancestral loyalties over western-style progress, and believe in the submergence of the individual will within the family structure in accordance with their deferential, pacific world view.

Where an American adviser might see a problem and determine an answer (which he would view as the answer), a Vietnamese might not see a problem, or he might consider the cost (e.g. break with tradition) too high to pay, or he might see many answers. The Buddhist saying "There is not just one Buddha" has no equivalent in Christianity. For the adults working with the Americans in Vietnam, war had become a way of life; for them the two world wars had not ended relatively quickly with dramatic success; in this context problems seemed less urgent, less able of solution. South Vietnamese leaders were often in a bind when they disagreed over a course of action with the Americans; they desired, they appreciated, they depended on American aid, yet they could not always agree on the form. Buttinger cites one example of this misunderstanding. Neither General Taylor nor any other American who proposed reforms realized in 1961 why their demands were never acted upon by the man who lived on American aid but refused to accept American advice. If Diem had ever seriously tried to raise the level of performance of his officials, he would soon have found that this was impossible. Opposed by the intellectuals, despised by the educated middle class, rejected by businessmen, hated by the youth and by all nationalists with political ambitions, and totally lacking in mass support, the Diem government had to rely for its survival on an apparatus of coercion. It needed administrators willing to side with the government against practically the entire people. Its officials were the ones obliged to apply directly the means required to maintain the regime--primarily force. They could not be the servants of the people; they had to be watchdogs over them. This function, in the long run, could not be exercised by decent and honest men.<sup>37/</sup> Thus a Vietnamese democracy existed in form more than in

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reality--the American desire was stronger than the Vietnamese.<sup>38/</sup> Equally, Vietnamese would sometimes resort to deceit to protect their own interests/values rather than broach a conflict with their American counterparts. Vietnamese misunderstanding of American imperatives furthered the problem.

The effect of cultural differences and ignorance is impossible to estimate, easy to underestimate. If its overall effects are hard to measure, at least certain of its more specific manifestations can be observed.

The war and the various aid programs had an extremely adverse effect on family and village life. Death, serious injury, and loss of property due to bombings or resettlement caused the once tightly knit family to disintegrate. Ties were further strained by differences over political loyalties; although rare, it was not unheard of to find one son in the South's armed forces, and another in the NLF/VC ranks. In fleeing from villages, ties to ancestral spirits were broken; traditional ancestral worship was disrupted, further disorienting the already distraught and often superstitious village population. The very building blocks of society were badly damaged and nothing substituted for them or measures enacted for their repair.

If the family and village were the building blocks of society, Confucian-Buddhist thought was the mortar. As observed above, Confucian thought compelled the individual to revere whomever held the reigns of power. Traditionally, of course, this meant the scholars in conjunction with the emperor. Yet as successive regimes toppled with the pressures of the situation, compounded willingly and unwillingly by the Americans, the credibility of the paternal protector became suspect. Traditional regard for the supreme leader could not survive the vicissitudes of the time. The framework of the society was weakening, with no coherent substitute being realistically provided.

Neither was Taoism compatible with the changing times. Its emphasis on the individual's harmonious existence with the universe could not explain and was not compatible with violent change. The rural population that still clung to its reverence for an ordered universe probably found military intrusions both bewildering and frightening.

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Nor was modern nationalism a easily viable substitute for the traditional hierachy. For those Vietnamese who remained loyal to traditional religions and social values, the idea of the modern state (particularly as espoused by communist leadership) would seem alien because such a state's conception of itself as a specialized instrument for the coordination of all aspects of public life had no real counterpart in traditional society. Traditional rulers may have been despotic, arbitrary, exploitative or merely cruel; they never imagined themselves, nor did their subjects imagine them to be executives of an omniscient state. Mostly they governed to protect their status and preserve their privileges, leaving village life intact. The notion that the state is a machine whose function is to organize the general interest is bound to be greeted with puzzlement and a measure of fear by the members of traditional Vietnamese society.

The North Vietnamese leadership understood this and built up their organization very carefully, incorporating where possible elements of traditional life.<sup>39/</sup>

In addition to weakening many of the traditional bonds of the Vietnamese society the American presence tended to stratify and distort the traditional class balances. Since independence, the impact of both the growth of government and the influx of US forces resulted in the substantial growth of the middle class. The urban poor also grew rapidly in numbers, due to the previously discussed refugee surge into Saigon and other large cities.

The growth of the urban middle class, especially in the Saigon region, ultimately produced an important political constituency, as did the urban poor--each class making competing demands on the central government. The middle class sought stability in government policy and economic life; the urban poor demanded increased government support and lower prices for basic life-support commodities.

The American build-up inevitably created many jobs connected with the war effort. For the perceptive Vietnamese there were lucrative opportunities to win contracts, act as middlemen and entrepreneurs and simply be employed by the Americans. This had its advantages and helped absorb the

underemployed in the burgeoning urban centers. But it also created a new wealthy urban class unknown in traditional Vietnamese society. The numbers of prostitutes and bar girls rose dramatically as well, creating a double dilemma for Vietnamese society; on the one hand rejected for their moral turpitude, these women by flaunting their newly procured material luxuries presented a direct challenge to traditional conservative values.

This grossly lopsided distribution of wealth caused to a large extent by the American presence, when coupled with the other problems facing the Vietnamese, could not but have unsettling effects. Those with lower salaries in the urban centers could feel frustrated. The rural poor could feel neglected and unduly burdened with the war. Many could feel appalled at the loss of traditional values, particularly at the Americanization of the youth, who conspicuously enjoyed certain American ways and possessions. Others would learn a lifestyle they could not support without the Americans, thus creating a dependent social class. Others could simply feel lost amidst all the change.

While many other significant divisions remained (e.g. rural-urban, religious, regional, etc.) Vietnam became increasingly divided into haves and have-nots, a modern day version of Disraeli's "two Englands."

Given this, it should not be surprising that the crime rate rose. For many people, particularly in urban centers, materialism had replaced traditional values, and those with few prospects for wealth were now more easily tempted by illegal means of acquisition.

The Americans were not perhaps sufficiently aware of both the value of maintaining some form of order based on traditional values and the very real damage being done to these values without any real substitute being provided. Between 1965-72 the US placed greater priority on prosecution of the war and economic programs than on utilizing the Vietnamese value structure to create a national society. The one significant exception (for military purposes) was the relationship between the Special Forces teams and the Montagnards. Perhaps because of the obvious necessity for gaining their allegiance and military support, some US Special Forces personnel partook of various rituals and became actual blood brothers of various

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Montagnard groups. This active participation produced worthwhile results--namely sincere trust between Montagnards and Americans in their many endeavors. Whether it would have been possible for US forces to apply techniques effectively to cement relationships with the other diverse populations in South Vietnam is highly debatable, given the overriding military operation requirements. But perhaps the fact that military operations were so overriding hints at what might be the most fundamental misunderstanding of the war--a misconception held by Diem as well as by US advisers and politicians. For:

Diem's method of fighting Communism was to concentrate on destroying their cadres, if necessary physically, instead of making them politically impotent by depriving them of mass support. He had not learned the lesson of the Indochina War--i.e., that a political movement cannot be destroyed by killing its exponents; he and his chief adviser, Nhu, subscribed to the primitive notion that the only good Communist was a dead one rather than a politically helpless one without popular support. The thought that in the South Vietnam of that time a dead Communist might prove more dangerous than a live one never entered their minds. They never realized that for every Communist killed, especially if he was a popular one who had fought in the resistance, two new ones were likely to spring up. Their almost total reliance on naked force in fighting political ideas was of course a corollary of the denial of political freedom and social justice. Instead of the bit of land the peasants wanted, they were given, in conjunction with a manhunt against Vietnam cadres, an unending series of sermons about the evils of Communism, delivered in compulsory meetings by officials whom the peasants had every reason to despise.40/

These are just a few of the more easily catalogued effects of American intervention on Vietnamese society. Some are positive and some detrimental, others are of debatable value. Some are nebulous and general, others lend themselves more easily to measurement and analysis. Some are undoubtedly still unrecognized or misunderstood. Whatever uncertainties and disagreements, it should become clear that Vietnamese society was not

in a good position to withstand the stress created by the American presence. To what extent different tacks could have produced different results can only be an educated guess. Whether blame should be ladled out, and to whom, depends on its answer. What the optimal results should have been in terms of the structure of Vietnamese society is a debated question. Whatever one's answer to this question, its attainment will probably be frustrated if the Vietnamese example is repeated; for it is surely a Herculean task to construct a new society while the foundation on which it is built is both unfamiliar and crumbling.

E. INSIGHTS

- Having recently emerged from colonial status with the sudden withdrawal of the French, the new country of South Vietnam faced an unfamiliar, changing, and often hostile situation with few available resources and fewer guiding principles for action. These uncertainties often emanated from and were reflected in Vietnamese society.
- Traditional Vietnamese society was very different from either French or American society, and could not easily be assimilated into a new Western cultural framework. Interaction between the American and Vietnamese societies while sometimes successful and amicable was often marked by ignorance and misunderstanding. It is doubtful whether US leadership had a clear vision of what they hoped Vietnamese society to be. Cooperation was almost bound to be strained; given the 'superior but equal' status of the US with her ally, but a better understanding of Vietnamese society and how this society affected US and Vietnamese goals would probably have saved much agony and error. The careful attention paid to traditional values by the communists is indicative of the importance of such an understanding.
- Even before the arrival of significant numbers of Americans, Vietnamese society was in turmoil. Traditional values and ways

were weakened by the French. The communist insurgency strained them further and created the need for a strong government to counter the challenge. Such a government was largely foreign to Vietnamese society, which, torn by serious internal divisions (religious, regional, social, ethnic, linguistic) was in no position to meet the demands successive governments imposed. Certain unifying elements were present but they were not and perhaps could not have been successfully exploited.

F. LESSON

- To assist an ally effectively against an insurgency movement it is as important to understand the ally as it is the enemy so that aid is not misdirected or counterproductive.

CHAPTER 1 ENDNOTES

1. See Harvey H. Smith, et. al., Area Handbook for South Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1967).
2. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, The South Vietnamese Society (McLean Virginia: General Research Corporation, 1978) p. 2.
3. Hinh and Tho, p. 6.
4. On village structure and village autonomy, and other aspects of Vietnamese village life see Luther A. Allen and Pham Ngoc An, A Vietnamese Village District Chief in Action (Saigon: Michigan State University Advisory Group, 1961). Also see Truong Ngoc Giap and Lloyd Woodruff, My Thuan: Administrative and Financial Aspects of a Village in South Vietnam (Saigon: Michigan State University, Vietnam Advisory Group, 1961). For the best summary of the above see Robert Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963) pp 8-11 and 32ff.
5. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled. Volume I From Colonialism to the Vietminh (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1967) p. 7. passim.
6. Ibid. p. 8.
7. Doumer's own and rather inflated account of his accomplishments sheds light on the French optimism and egotism of the day, as well as providing an inside account of the life of a French Indochinese civil servant. Paul Doumer, L'Indo-China Francaise: Souvenirs (Paris: Vuibert et Nony, 1905).
8. For a more complete account of the role of the French businessmen in Vietnam see Phillippe Devillers Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 a 1952 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952) p. 41 passim. Buttinger provides a good account of this period in English.
9. On the futility of the building of the railroad and other aspects of Doumer's policy see Stephen H. Roberts History of French Colonial Policy 1870-1925 (London: P. S. King, 1929). Cf. Buttinger, Volume I pp. 29-31.
10. The failure of the railroads to modernize the Vietnamese economy is extensively treated in Charles Robequain, The Economic Development of French Indochina (London: Oxford University Press, 1944) p. 105.
11. The entire period of French occupation of Vietnam is particularly well covered in Virginia Thompson, French Indochina, London: Allen



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& Unwin, 1937) Ms. Thompson is extremely critical of the railroad program.

12. Hinh and Tho, op. cit. p. 9.
13. Hinh and Tho, op. cit. p. 20.
14. Estimates vary significantly on the extent of the damage done by rapid French withdrawal from Vietnam. See Wesley R. Fishel, Vietnam: Is Victory Possible? (New York: Foreign Policy Association Headline Series, February 1964) pp. 29-30. See also Robert Scigliano, "Impact of Military Expenditures on South Vietnam's Economy" in Far Eastern Economic Review December 25, 1958, p. 839. And see Bernard Fall, The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963). p. 291.
15. Fischel, op. cit. p. 32.
16. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled Volume II Vietnam at War (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1967) p. 919.
17. Compare relevant passages in the following: Buttinger, Vol. II op. cit. pp. 931-935, Fall, Two Vietnams, pp. 311-312, Robert Scigliano "The Electoral Process in South Vietnam. Politics in an Underdeveloped State." Midwest Journal of Political Science IV, May 1960, pp. 138-61, and John Mecklin, Mission in Torment: An Intimate Account of the U.S. Role in Vietnam (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965) pp. 11-12.
18. See also chapter 7 of this volume.
19. Douglas Pike, War, Peace and the Viet Cong (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967) p. 55.
20. On divisions within the Cao Dai, for example, see Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968) p. 264. Cf Smith, op. cit. p. 186.
21. Monsignor Joseph J. Harnett, "The Vietnamese Refugee Five Years Later," Migration News, September-October, 1959.
22. On the hopelessness of Diem's position see Buttinger, Vol II op. cit. p. 858. See also Carl T. Rowan, The Pitiful and the Proud (New York: Random House, 1956). See also the relevant section of this chapter, Bases for Unity, on the possibility of creating a viable state.
23. On Catholic-Buddhist rivalry see inter alia Jean Lacouture, Vietnam: Between Two Truces (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) pp. 207-215.

24. See Bernard Fall, The Viet-Minh Regime (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program and the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1956) p. 62.
25. Anthony T. Bouscaren, The Last of the Mandarins: Diem of Vietnam (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1965). Bouscaren estimates that the US spent more than \$4 billion in aid prior to 1954.
26. For a discussion of the General Hinh affair see Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) pp. 345 +. See also Robert J. MacAllister, "The Great Gamble: United States Policy Toward South Viet Nam From July 1954 to July 1956" a dissertation. University of Chicago, Department of Political Science, 1958. This is a very thorough and balanced account of the period.
27. For various views on Diem's role in Vietnamese history and his abilities see Bernard Fall, The Two Vietnams, Bouscaren, op. cit. for a very uncritical view, and Denis Warner The Last Confucian (New York: Macmillan, 1963) for a very critical appraisal.
28. Buttinger, Vol II, pp. 861-878.
29. Hinh and Tho, op. cit. pp. 96-97.
30. Ibid. pp. 97-103.
31. On the disruption of services (e.g. education) in rural areas see Fall, The Two Vietnams, p. 360 and Smith, op. cit., p. 151.
32. Gerald Cannon Hickey, Village in Vietnam (New Haven Ct. and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 285.
33. Buttinger, Vol II, p. 942.
34. See Chapter 3 of this volume.
35. Buttinger, Vol II, p. 918.

The story of U.S. policy toward the Diem regime richly illustrates the power of wishful political thinking, the shortcomings of U.S. diplomacy, and the fact that the United States still does not know the most effective methods of fighting Communism. But it is not an entirely negative story. In principle, there was nothing wrong with the decision that South Vietnam should be helped to survive as a non-Communist state--if it turned out that this was what its people wanted. But whether or not this was the wish of the people could not have been fairly determined in 1954.

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36. Ibid. p. 919.
37. Ibid. p. 952.
38. Scigliano, South Vietnam, and Scigliano, "The Electoral Process in South Vietnam. Politics in an Underdeveloped State," pp. 88-100.
39. Compare Hinh and Tho, op. cit. p. 16.
40. Buttinger, Vol II, p. 974.

CHAPTER 2  
GOVERNMENT

French colonial rule had left South Vietnam with little preparation for self-government, and since its attainment of independence in 1954 the country has been handicapped by a lack of mature political institutions and by a dearth of popular and capable leaders.<sup>1/</sup>

About three-fourths of all respondents [to a 1967 survey in 122 hamlets throughout RNV] never heard about the Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam...

Only about ten percent are able to say what they heard and even their recollection is very vague. Four percent say the Constitution is the "government system," three percent recall "freedom, democracy," two percent see in it "the country's law" and only one percent recall some of the articles.

When asked what the Constitution means to them personally, a few more people reflect concrete notions. Five percent say it protects the citizen's rights and properties, four percent say it means freedom and democracy, to two percent it gave confidence in the Government and another two percent see in it some vague benefits for citizens in it. Nevertheless fourteen percent do not know what the Constitution means to them personally, four percent say it means nothing to them and the bulk of seventy-four percent - as indicated above - never heard of it at all.<sup>2/</sup>

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the structure and functioning of the Government of South Vietnam (GVN). The approach is both descriptive and analytical.

What follows is not a definitive treatment of the GVN from 1954 to the fall of Saigon in 1975. Rather, it is a selective presentation designed to highlight the problems experienced by the GVN during that period and, indirectly, the problems encountered by the United States in working with the successive regimes which exercised political power in South Vietnam throughout the period of our involvement.

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This chapter is organized into four parts. It is recognized that a central problem which confronted the GVN throughout the period in question was that of adapting western democratic political institutions to a non-western political culture. Accordingly the first section of the chapter is devoted to highlighting some of the more important aspects of the traditional Vietnamese political culture. A brief assessment of the French political legacy is also presented. The second section is devoted to an examination of the evolution of the GVN from an organizational or structural perspective. We then proceed, through a series of observations, to discuss the operation of the GVN from what amounts to a functional perspective. The concluding portion of the chapter reviews insights generated by the analysis performed in the preceding sections and offers lessons for the United States.

It is a central thesis of the chapter that during the period in question the GVN represented a government within a government, whipsawed, so to speak, between democratic institutions, on the one hand, and the indigenous political culture, on the other. Under Diem, and later during the closing years of the Thieu regime, after 1972, the process of reconciling these two imperatives was facilitated by the presence of leaders who possessed the "mandate of heaven."<sup>3/</sup> The absence of such a leader in the interim, as much as anything else, contributed to the problems experienced by the GVN and, indirectly, to the problems experienced by the United States in its efforts to implement the variety of political and economic programs of "nation building." The problems were, of course, magnified by an active counterinsurgency effort in the early stages, and a major and modern combined-arms threat in the months immediately prior to the fall of Saigon. Yet, to blame the difficulties experienced by the GVN and, indirectly by the United States, in the joint pursuit of "nation-building" entirely on the evolving military situation, is to ignore the more fundamental political problems associated with the clash of two very different political cultures.

Initially the United States had two major objectives in Vietnam: to halt the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia and to establish a

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democratic government in South Vietnam. The first objective was at least understandable given the realities which appeared to govern the situation. The second objective was not, at least in retrospect, given the political realities which both preceded and attended our involvement in the conflict.

### 1. The Political Culture: A Historical Perspective

Vietnam, North as well as South, had no democratic tradition.<sup>4/</sup> The political tradition was one of benevolent despotism. Prior to the arrival of the French, politics and political attitudes developed out of, and were nurtured by, the Confucian concept that government was the sole preserve of the virtuous. In keeping with the Chinese tradition men governed with the "mandate of heaven." Changes in government were equated with divine disapproval rather than a loss of popular support. The idea that "the will of the people is the will of God" was totally alien to Vietnamese society. Approval from "above" rather than from "below" was the key to legitimacy. In politics, as in all other areas, the imperative for man was adjustment and acceptance rather than activism and change. The idea that man could control his political fate was as incomprehensible as the idea that man could control other aspects of his existence. Politics and government reflected the natural order. If some ruled and others were ruled, that was the way it was meant to be. Traditionally, government was viewed as an instrument of divine will rather than one of social change or the realization of human aspirations. The individual was responsible to government. Government, in turn, was responsible to "God".

This concept of governance is probably best illustrated by the traditional relationship between the central government or royal court, and the village.<sup>5/</sup> For the peasant, the village constituted the totality of the political universe. It served as the filter through which the demands of the central government for taxes and manpower were interpreted and assessed. In that capacity, the village government served as both a "fortress" against the outside world and as a mechanism for interpreting the natural order of things.

Within the village, political life generally mirrored economic life. Wealth was viewed as a reward for virtue and political prominence

was an added manifestation of "divine" approval. This orientation was used by the central government or royal court for its own purposes. Just as the peasants were not supposed to involve themselves in the politics of village governance, so the village was not expected to involve itself in the politics of the royal court. In the best tradition of the "mandarinate" the village was expected to respond to demands, not initiate them. Taxes assessed were to be paid. Manpower, whether for public works or military purposes, was to be provided. The costs of allocating these burdens were to be borne by the village. In return the village was accorded considerable autonomy by the central government. In effect, the concept of participatory democracy, either by the individual or by the village political elite, was anathema to the politics of Vietnam prior to the imposition of French colonial rule.

2. The French Legacy

The cause of democratic government in Vietnam was certainly not served by the establishment of French rule.<sup>6/</sup> For the French, the indigenous political system was viewed as a mechanism for reducing the costs of political domination while increasing the benefits to France. Divine acceptance, or the possession of virtue, as criteria for elite selection were replaced by a willingness to serve the cause of the French imperium. If the administrative arrangements served any purpose at all, they served the purpose of divide and conquer. Participatory democracy was discouraged, and elite participation was equated with a willingness to accept French culture, education and colonial objectives. As a consequence, participation in the political life of Indochina required either a commitment to collaboration or an ability to accept the sacrifices and risks of working outside the established political order. Changing the political order from within was not an available option under the French colonial system. As long as the French remained the dominant and unchallenged political power on the peninsula, the use of the governmental system to play groups of political elites against each other worked very well. The imposition of Japanese control and the necessity of French collaboration with the policy of subordinating the well-being of the people of Vietnam to

the requirements of the Japanese war machine served to undermine whatever legitimacy the colonial administration had acquired in the minds of the people and the political elites of Indochina.

By the end of WW II, French rule in Indochina had been thoroughly discredited. Confronted by a communist insurgency which had captured the cause of Vietnamese nationalism in an era of anticolonialism, the French Corps Expeditionnaire (FCE) embarked on what amounted to a "fools errand."<sup>7</sup> Western military force was being used to support Western political arrangements which were neither relevant to the general population nor useful to the political elites who had tied their hopes for the future to continued French rule. As French fortunes waned on the battlefield, they waned in Saigon and Hanoi, to say nothing of Paris. By 1954 two things were clear: In North Vietnam the "mandate of heaven" had become the "mandate of Marx;" in the South the "mandate of heaven" had passed initially to Bao Dai courtesy of the French and subsequently to Ngo Dinh Diem.

#### B. THE GVN: AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

On October 26, 1955, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) came into existence. Under the control of Ngo Dinh Diem, the RVN held its first general election in March 1956, for the purpose of selecting a National Constituent Assembly. The Assembly in turn selected a 15 member commission to draft a constitution which was promulgated on October 26, 1956.<sup>8</sup>

##### 1. The Diem Regime

The organizational arrangements set forth in the new constitution reflected a blend of US constitutional experience, French administrative practice and traditional Vietnamese political values. Although the national government was composed of three branches, executive, legislative and judicial, the latter, in keeping with French practice, was not autonomous but rather, functioned under what was called the Department of Justice. The new constitution embraced the principle of separation of powers, but it also embraced the more traditional Vietnamese political value of organizational harmony. The branches might have been independent



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of each other, at least the executive and legislative branches, but they were clearly expected to function as one under the personal leadership of President Diem.

Of the two branches the executive was clearly dominant. Under the 1956 Constitution the president was elected for a term of five years by a direct and secret ballot. The electoral process was based on universal suffrage. The president, in this case Diem, was both head of the state and the supreme commander of the armed forces. The office was assigned broad emergency powers and the president was expected to rule by decree during those periods of time when the National Assembly was not in session. Constraints on the presidential power were minimal and those that did exist were unlikely to be enforced by a National Assembly composed of members, the majority of whom were loyal to Diem. In effect, under the 1956 constitution, the RVN was to be governed by an elected "mandarin" personified by Ngo Dinh Diem and, indirectly, by his brothers Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can. Under the arrangements set forth, the influence and control of the Ngo brothers extended from Saigon all the way down to the hamlet level.<sup>9/</sup>

With respect to the legislative branch, the first elections for a National Assembly were held on August 30, 1959. The control of Diem and his family was amply demonstrated by the fact that all but two of the 123 seats were occupied by parties or individual candidates whose loyalty to the regime was clearly established.<sup>10/</sup>

From an organizational perspective the GVN operated largely unchanged until the abortive coup of November 11, 1960. For all intents and purposes, the organizational arrangements set forth in the 1956 constitution were either bypassed by Diem and his family or were manipulated to ratify or legitimize what amounted to rule by personal fiat. Following the abortive coup a number of important administrative reforms were announced which, ostensibly at least, were designed to improve administrative efficiency. Among the reforms announced were the following:

- The number of agencies directly attached to the presidency was reduced from 20 to six. The remaining 14 agencies were placed under appropriate government departments.

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- The creation of two new departments each under a minister for Rural Affairs, to take over the Offices of Agricultural Development, Agricultural Credit, and Rural Reconstruction, and for Civic Action, Information and Youth.
- The grouping of the governmental departments dealing, respectively with security, economic development, and cultural and social affairs.
- The creation of a National Economic Council and a Cultural and Social Council to help in preparing government projects and programs, and of a Cultural Institute to help promote scientific research and artistic activities.
- As a first step toward fully elected village councils, a member responsible for youth and information work would be elected to each existing council by the local number of the government's youth organization; elected village, municipal and provincial councils would subsequently be established.11/

These announced reforms were followed by presidential elections on April 9, 1961 and an extensive cabinet reorganization implemented on May 27, 1961. Not unexpectedly Ngo Dinh Diem was re-elected by an overwhelming majority. Although Diem received less than half the potential vote in Saigon, he swept the rural areas amid opposition charges of terrorism and intimidation. Whatever the announced objectives of the cabinet reorganization, its consequences were essentially to further consolidate the hold of Diem and his family on the administrative apparatus of the GVN. This objective was carried one step further on October 19, 1961, when the National Assembly, in response to the worsening military situation, passed a bill giving Diem the power for twelve months, to proclaim decrees required "to protect national security and mobilize manpower resources." From then until his death on November 1, 1963, the organizational set-up outlined in the 1956 Constitution and amended in the reorganization of May 1961, functioned at the behest of Diem and his family rather than the people of South Vietnam.

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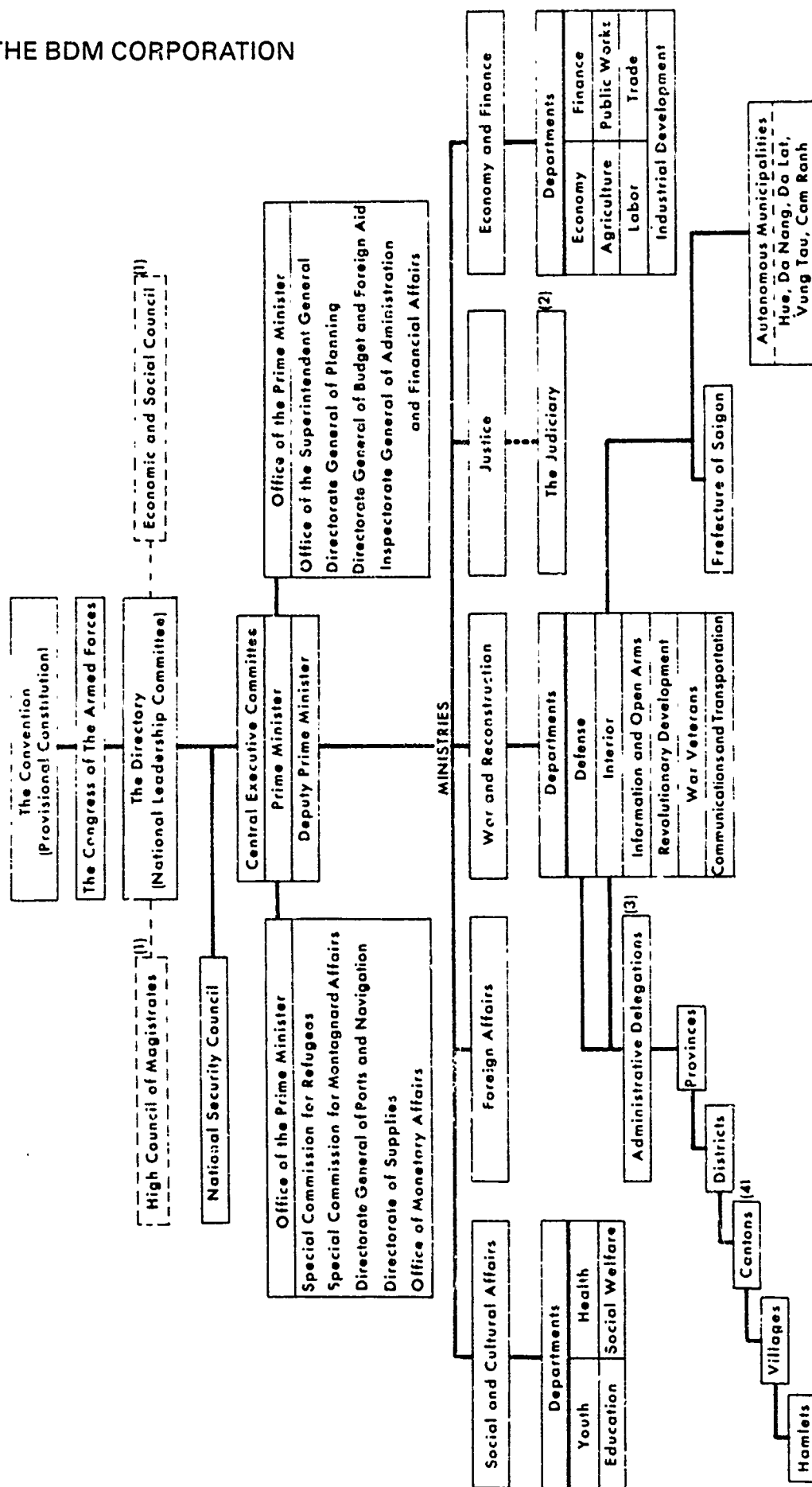
Between the assassination of Diem and the establishment of the government of Nguyen Cao Ky in June, 1965, the RVN was governed by a Revolutionary Military Council headed first by Major General Huong Van Minh and later by Major General Nguyen Khanh.<sup>12/</sup> The establishment of the Revolutionary Military Council was accompanied by the abrogation of the 1956 Constitution and the promulgation of four successive provisional charters. The last provisional charter or constitution, promulgated on October 20, 1964, envisioned an orderly transfer of power to a civilian government. The civilian leadership subsequently installed was unable to handle the responsibilities of governing the RVN and on June 1965 turned over power to a group of military officers headed by Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu.<sup>13/</sup>

### 2. The Thieu-Ky Regime

Initially at least, under Ky and Thieu the center of governmental power resided in what was called the National Leadership Committee or the Directory composed of 10 members and headed by Nguyen Van Thieu.<sup>14/</sup> The Committee appointed Nguyen Cao Ky as Prime Minister and proceeded to proclaim a new provisional constitution. The provisional constitution, or as it was officially titled, The Convention, vested temporary authority in the Congress of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, a body composed of all the general officers of the armed services of South Vietnam. Soon after its creation the membership of the National Leadership Committee was expanded to include 10 civilians and an Election Law Drafting Committee was created.

The governmental structure established by Ky and Thieu is depicted on Figure 2-1.<sup>15/</sup> With some minor organizational changes it continued to operate until late 1966 when elections were held for a Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly, elected in September 1966, moved quickly to prepare a new constitution, which was adopted on January 10, 1967. The organizational structure embodied in the new constitution provided for three branches of government (legislative, executive and judicial), an elected president and vice president, a bicameral legislature, a prime minister appointed by the president, a Supreme Court, and the

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(1) Not formed yet.  
 (2) The court system is administered by the Ministry of Justice  
 (3) The military commanders of the four corps areas also head the four administrative delegations; military aspects of provincial administration are reported directly to the Secretary of State for Defense, whereas civil aspects are reported to the Secretary of State for the Interior  
 (4) Not present in all districts SOURCE: Harvey Smith, et al., Area Handbook for South Vietnam

Figure 2-1. Governmental Structure in 1966.

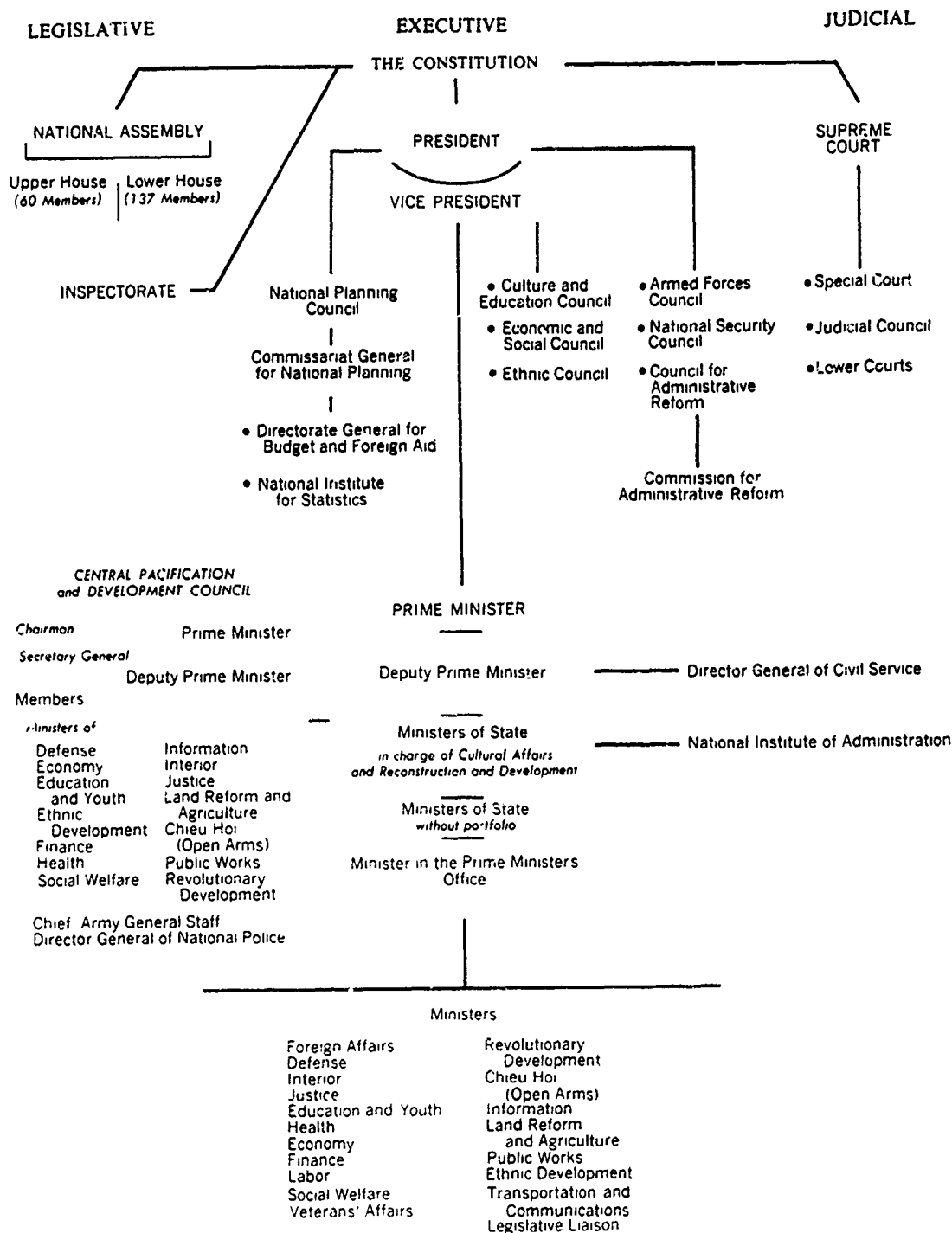
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popular election of province chiefs, mayors and members of village, province and municipal councils. Village chiefs were to be elected by village councils from among their respective memberships. An Inspectorate was established to investigate charges of administrative abuse or corruption on the part of public as well as private agencies. Membership of the Inspectorate would be between 9 and 18 inspectors with one third designated by the National Assembly, the President and the Supreme Court, respectively. The organizational structure set forth in the 1967 Constitution is depicted in Figure 2-2.<sup>16/</sup>

Despite periodic reorganization of the executive branch, which accompanied successive efforts by different prime ministers selected by Thieu to form new governments, the basic structure of governance spelled out in 1967 remained unchanged up until the fall of Saigon. As in the case of the Diem regime, the existence of democratic institutions belied the fact that the government of Nguyen Van Thieu was, at least until 1972, heavily dependent on military support and, in terms of its operation, tended to be democratic in name only.<sup>17/</sup> The success encountered by President Thieu in mobilizing support for the GVN after 1972 appears to have been less the result of a flowering of democratic government in the RVN than a tribute to Thieu's capacity to generate a growing confidence in his ability to guide the political destiny of the RVN. In effect, Thieu's success in the latter stages of his administration appears to have been more attributable to his ability to secure the "mandate of heaven" than to the "rooting" of representative democracy in the political "soil" of South Vietnam.

Having said this, it would be a mistake to conclude that the organizational arrangements depicted above were nothing more than a structural facade contrived solely for the purpose of masking a personal despotism. If the succession of leaders, constitutions and governmental reorganizations such as those depicted in Figure 2-3 convey any message,<sup>18/</sup> it is that the task of melding democratic political institutions to the indigenous Vietnamese political culture proved to be an exceedingly difficult one, especially after the death of Ngo Dinh Diem. The political

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SOURCE: CIA, National Intelligence Survey, 43D

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Figure 2-2. Governmental Structure According to the 1967 Constitution.

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DATE OF CHANGE	CHIEF OF STATE	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	REAL SOURCE OF POWER
1954: JUL 7	NG DAI	PRIME MINISTER NGO DINH DIEM	NGO DINH DIEM
1955: OCTOBER 23	PRESIDENT NGO DINH DIEM	NGO DINH DIEM	NGO DINH DIEM, NGO DINH KHU AND NGO DINH CAN.
1963: NOVEMBER 1	MAJOR GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH	PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN NGOC THO	REVOLUTIONARY MILITARY COUNCIL, UNDER DUONG VAN MINH.
1964: JANUARY 30	MAJOR GENERAL NGUYEN KHANH	NGUYEN KHANH	REVOLUTIONARY MILITARY COUNCIL, UNDER NGUYEN KHANH.
FEBRUARY 8	MAJOR GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH	PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN KHANH	REVOLUTIONARY MILITARY COUNCIL.
AUGUST 15	PRESIDENT NGUYEN KHANH		
AUGUST 27		ACTING PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN XUAN OANH.	PROVISIONAL LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE (KHANH MINH AND TRAN THIEN KHIEM).
SEPTEMBER 3 <sup>1</sup>	MAJOR GENERAL DUONG VAN MINH	PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN KHANH	KHANH, KHANH AND KHIEM, UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30, 1964.
OCTOBER 26	PHAM KHAC SUU	PRIME MINISTER TRAN VAN HUONG	ARMED FORCES COUNCIL (FROM DECEMBER 18, 1964 TO MAY 6, 1965) (MINH WAS DROPPED IN NOVEMBER 1964).
1964: JANUARY 27	DO	ACTING PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN XUAN OANH.	ARMED FORCES COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 16 <sup>1</sup>	DO	PRIME MINISTER PHAM HUY QUAT.	ARMED FORCES COUNCIL (KHANH WAS OUSTED ON FEBRUARY 21, 1965).
JUNE 19 <sup>2</sup>	MAJOR GENERAL NGUYEN VAN THIEU	PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN CAO KY	THE DIRECTORY (NATIONAL LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE--10 GENERALS).

1. ATTEMPTED COUPS, ON SEPT. 13, 1964, and FEB. 19, 1965, RESPECTIVELY, FAILED.
2. ACTUAL TAKEOVER BY AIR VICE MARSHAL NGUYEN CAO KY ON JUNE 12; THE FORMATION OF THE CABINET TOOK PLACE ON JUNE 19.

SOURCE: CIA, David Smith, et al., Area Handbook for South Vietnam

Figure 2-3. Changes in the South Vietnamese Government Leadership, 1954-1966

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turmoil which characterized the operation of the GVN for almost ten years after his assassination, is as much attributable to the absence of a political leader possessed of the "mandate of heaven" as to anything else. Lacking such a leader the process of adapting Western democratic institutions to what amounted to an alien political culture constituted little more than an "exercise in futility." Once that indispensable ingredient was restored, as appears to have been the case after 1972, the process initiated by Diem and interrupted by his assassination, was resumed under Thieu. As we will note elsewhere in this chapter, the resumption of the process of reconciling Western political institutions with an Asian political culture was well under way when overtaken by events on the battlefield. Had the military situation in South Vietnam not deteriorated so rapidly with the massive influx of troops from the DRV, coupled with the unwillingness of the US to re-enter the conflict, the process might well have reached fruition.

In this section we have looked at the GVN from an organizational or structural perspective. Without suggesting that the organizational developments described above were a total sham or facade, the fact remains that a fuller understanding of the GVN emerges from what might be described as a functional perspective. It is in an understanding of the shortcomings of the processes which characterized the operation of the GVN that a true appreciation of both the problems of "nation building" in South Vietnam and, more importantly, of the role of the United States in that effort, is to be found.<sup>19/</sup>

### C. THE GVN: A FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

It was within the context of the indigenous political culture that the effort to establish a democratic government in South Vietnam evolved. From the outset the effort confronted a variety of obstacles. In addition to the challenge posed by the need to combat an active insurgency while "building democracy", there were such factors as regional and social fragmentation, lack of experienced administrators, organized and armed opposition to the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, the personality of Diem himself and



his brothers Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, and the centrality of military rather than popular support to the maintenance of political stability.20/

In retrospect it is impossible to say with any confidence which factor or combination of factors was most important in the failure to establish a truly democratic government in South Vietnam. Even to measure with any precision their individual impacts on the effort poses almost insuperable problems. The available data are not only conflicting in assigning blame for the failure of democracy in South Vietnam but provide little in the way of hard evidence to support the conflicting assertions made.

1. Democratic Government - Contrasting Perceptions

This is not the place to attempt a detailed history of the effort to develop democratic government in South Vietnam. A careful reading of the available evidence, however, suggests a number of important observations which do deserve to be made. 21/ To begin with, despite the apparently democratic character of the various constitutions and numerous organizational arrangements established from 1956 onward, it is quite clear that the practice of democracy as we have come to know it in the United States never materialized. 22/ In the period from 1956 to Diem's ouster in 1963 the main obstacles to the institution of democratic government appear to have been the personal preferences of Diem and his family, the worsening military situation and the abiding belief that the extension of democracy to the people of South Vietnam would not only hinder the war effort but would jeopardize the survival of the incumbent regime. After the fall of Diem, the appeal of democratic rule steadily diminished for the successive groups of military leaders who assumed control in Saigon. In effect, throughout the period from the ceasefire in 1954 to the collapse of GVN in 1975, whatever internal incentive existed for the establishment of democratic government steadily diminished to a point where in the end it had totally evaporated.

In a related vein, it is readily apparent that the cause of democratic government in South Vietnam was not particularly well served by the policies pursued by the United States throughout the period of our involvement. This is not to argue that the United States could, acting

alone, improve representative democracy in the RVN. Nor is it to argue that such a course would have been particularly desirable, given both the indigenous political culture and the requirement to deal with a maturing communist insurgency. It is to argue that the priorities guiding US policies, namely, the establishment and maintenance of a stable government which would act as a bulwark against the spread of communism in Asia, made it extremely difficult to counter the preference for one or another form of authoritarian rule exhibited first by Diem, and later, by the generals who succeeded him.<sup>23/</sup>

To carry this point one step further, it must be noted that whatever leverage and incentive we did have to enforce the establishment of a genuine democracy diminished in direct proportion to the size and extensiveness of our participation in the war effort. In a curious, if not paradoxical way, it might even be noted that the period of greatest leverage for enforcing demands for the establishment of democratic government was during the early years of the Diem regime when our commitment to the survival of the GVN extended to scattered Special Forces "A" and "B" detachments and limited military and economic assistance. It was in the period, circa 1956-59, that instead of employing the leverage inherent in a narrowly circumscribed commitment to the Diem regime, the United States settled for periodic reforms, which were essentially cosmetic in character, and vague promises of a better life and increased freedom for the people of South Vietnam.

Again, without arguing that the US could or should have pushed for the imposition of representative democracy in the RVN, it is a fact that our support for the ouster of Diem coupled with the massive infusion of men and materiel into South Vietnam served to tie the United States both morally and materially to the machinations of what can only be described as "politics by coup d'etat."<sup>24/</sup> Bolstered by such support, the leaders who succeeded Diem could proceed, confident in the knowledge that continued United States presence would more than compensate for their individual and collective disinterest in democratic reforms and their varying interest in the forceful repression of political and other organized forms of opposition. In effect, government by the military became government of and for

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the military. Short of a complete termination of the US commitment, the United States, acting through a succession of ambassadors and MACV, could do little more than express support for the incumbent leadership in the interest of reducing the frequency of crisis and preserving at least a facade of political stability in Saigon.25/

### 2. Democratic Government: An Alien Import

Even if there had been internal interest in, or external leverage for, the establishment of democratic government in the RVN, the obstacles to achieving such an objective in any reasonable length of time, if ever, were formidable indeed. As already noted the concept of participatory democracy in the sense of using government as an instrument of social and political change was simply alien to the indigenous political culture.26/ The French colonial policy of restricting Vietnamese participation in the administration of Indochina to insignificant functions was hardly calculated to develop the necessary administrative talent to operate a national democratic government.27/ The administrative talent which did exist at the village and, to a lesser extent, at the provincial levels was gradually but effectively decimated by the communist insurgents.28/

The policies pursued by the GVN itself were hardly conducive to the development and maintenance of democratic political infrastructure in South Vietnam. Resettlement programs, no matter how justified from the standpoint of a successful prosecution of the war effort, carried with them a very high social as well as psychological cost. Removing peasants from their ancestral lands, no matter how justified in the name of the war effort, was hardly calculated to endear the rural population to the national government. The periodic implementation of land reform rather than land tenure reform programs did little to correct the economic and resultant social inequities of rural life. The reorganization of government down to the local level and the imposition of what amounted to a centralized administration staffed by military personnel appointed from above rather than elected from below served to erode whatever semblance of self-government had survived the colonial interlude and the Japanese occupation.29/

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In the urban areas the policies pursued by the GVN could hardly be described as being compatible with mobilizing and maintaining popular political support for the central government. To be sure the initial efforts of the Diem regime to halt corruption and suppress the various sects which operated in the cities and the provinces were undoubtedly necessary, if only to bring some semblance of order to the chaos and confusion which prevailed under the aegis of Bao Dai. Over time, these policies became less discriminating as any and all political opposition was equated by Diem and his family as a manifestation of disloyalty and an unwarranted interference in the running of what had become a personal fiefdom.

No less harmful from the standpoint of mobilizing the urban population of South Vietnam were the numerous perversions of the various political processes designed for the purpose of coping with political dissent and legitimate opposition to the established government perpetuated first by Diem, and continued by those who succeeded him. Political parties, for example, which should have served to mirror the ethnic, religious and political diversity of South Vietnamese society were, under Diem at least, reduced to little more than instruments for ratifying and legitimizing the policies of Diem and his brothers.<sup>30/</sup> Under subsequent administrations their ability to represent opponents of the government was even further restrained in the interest of pursuing a unified war effort. A similar fate befell opposition newspapers which were required to operate, if they operated at all, under various forms of governmental censorship.

Again, it is not our purpose to argue whether these and other measures were good or bad, wise or short-sighted, necessary or not. The fact of the matter is, that these measures, coupled with the more direct and apparently brutal acts of political repression hardly could be said to serve the cause of mobilizing political support for a democratic government. A society which was as diverse and fragmented as that of South Vietnam, required a political mechanism which would mirror and respond to that diversity.<sup>31/</sup> Failure to provide such mechanisms or, when they existed, if only on paper, to tolerate their operation, was bound to

intensify the smoldering opposition which, until 1972, grew in intensity as the facade of unity and stability gave way to the spectacle of periodic changes in national leadership.

3. Democratic Government and The War Effort

It should be observed that the operation of the government of South Vietnam, democratic or otherwise, was seriously hampered by what may be described as a continuing failure or refusal to recognize the nature of the communist insurgency and the relationship between government policies and the requirements of successfully coping with that insurgency. This is not the place to debate the question of whether the war was a civil war or whether it was a simple case of externally supported aggression. In either case the challenge was, initially at least, political rather than military in character. At stake throughout was the loyalty and allegiance of the people of South Vietnam.<sup>32/</sup> The DRV demonstrated that allegiance could be achieved through a ruthless program of land reform and collectivization. Land reform in the North was actually a deliberate population-control program which succeeded in weakening the traditional socio-economic fabric of rural society, leaving the peasant without traditional sources of authority. He was increasingly tied to the government, sometimes through a combination of fear and guilt for having participated in the terror that swept the DRV countryside in the name of land reform.

Alternatively, the allegiance of the rural population could be achieved by the creation of a strong central government capable of formulating and implementing policies that were truly responsive to the genuine needs of the people of South Vietnam. Under Diem, efforts in this direction initially enjoyed at least partial success. After 1960, however, as the intensity of the communist insurgency grew, the successive leaderships in South Vietnam became increasingly preoccupied with using the governmental apparatus as just another instrument for waging war. In part, this could be attributed to the indigenous political culture and, more particularly, to the absence of a political tradition in which government assumed responsibility for improving the day-to-day existence of the population. To an even greater extent, however, it appears to have derived

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from the abiding belief, held with varying intensity over time, that the central challenge to the government in Saigon was military rather than political. That perception, coupled with the fact that after Diem the leadership of the GVN was drawn from the military and survived primarily with the support of the military, more than anything else, seems to explain the fact that government institutions were employed as adjuncts to the war effort rather than as instruments for political action designed to secure and maintain the loyalty of the people of South Vietnam.<sup>33/</sup>

To be sure, periodic efforts were made to mobilize political support for the GVN. For the most part those efforts appear to have been made at the instigation of the United States. The evidence suggests that such efforts were carried out in a half-hearted and, more often than not belated fashion, by government personnel, military as well as civilian, who either did not understand or, if they understood, refused to accept the importance of political action and, more directly, political mobilization in coping with a communist insurgency.

In this connection it is generally assumed that the establishment of an effective governmental apparatus in South Vietnam capable of securing and maintaining the support of the population would have been successful in the absence of an armed insurgency. Under the circumstances the validity of that assumption can be neither proven nor disproven. No doubt, the requirement to fight an active conflict while attempting "nation building" imposed a severe burden on the human and material resources available to the GVN. At the same time it should be noted that from the very outset the GVN was never able to wrest the cause of Vietnamese nationalism from Ho Chi Minh and his followers.<sup>34/</sup> It should also be noted that the communist cadres in RVN working with significantly fewer resources and under conditions that were no less difficult, were able to establish a political infrastructure in the countryside and, from what we know, in the cities as well, which although weakened in the 1968 Tet offensive had performed well prior to that time.<sup>35/</sup>

The fact that the communists were able to create a "shadow government," whereas that same objective consistently eluded the leadership

of the GVN, can be attributed to any number of factors, not the least of which was a willingness to employ terror and violence to eliminate the more competent honest and loyal administrators available to Saigon. Be that as it may, there is every reason to believe that the failure of the GVN to match the accomplishment of the communists was as much attributable to both the failure of the former to appreciate the importance of political organization and mobilization in combating the communist insurgency as it was to an appreciation of that fact on the other side. All things considered, the conversion of the governmental apparatus of the GVN into what was primarily an instrument for waging war rather than a political instrument for mobilizing and maintaining popular support constituted a primary factor in the failure to establish a democratic government in South Vietnam.

4. Democratic Government: A Splendored Irrelevance

It is readily apparent that in the end the effectiveness or political ineffectiveness of the GVN was not the decisive factor to the eventual outcome of the war effort. This is not to suggest that the instability which prevailed in Saigon after Diem and before the last years of the Thieu regime did not affect the war effort. Nor is it to suggest that the picture which the GVN conveyed to the outside world, particularly to the people of the United States, a picture of indecisiveness, corruption and repression, whether accurate or not, did not affect the external political environment and, indirectly US resolve to remain in South Vietnam. It suggests that the relationship between operational effectiveness of the GVN and the ebb and flow of the military situation was indirect at best.<sup>36/</sup>

If one looks at the development of the war effort and the evolution of the GVN, it is difficult, if not impossible, to resist the conclusion that, although the insurgency in the South began as essentially a political challenge, in the closing days of the war the decisive challenge was embodied in the conventional military threat posed by units from the DRV. Had the relationships been a direct one, then the prospects for a communist military victory in the South should have been correlated with the fluctuating political situation in Saigon. Clearly no such correlation is to be found in a reading of events which transpired between 1956 and

1975. On the contrary, the available evidence suggests that in the closing months of conflict the government in Saigon had achieved more stability and operational effectiveness, relatively speaking, than at any time since the fall of Diem. Conversely, the evidence also suggests that during the periods of greatest political instability, e.g., the last two years of the Diem regime and the four or five years which followed, the military situation from the standpoint of the United States and the GVN not only did not deteriorate significantly but, on the contrary, actually improved in some respects.

A more accurate assessment of the relationships of the GVN to the war effort would appear to lie in the fact that as long as US military and other forms of support were available, the incentive for political development remained low. Failure to act effectively in that period to consolidate political control and build a reliable political base throughout the RVN constituted what can only be described as a lost opportunity.<sup>37/</sup> When, in the closing years of the war, policies designed to improve the political position of the GVN were finally being implemented with some degree of success, they were simply overtaken by the US withdrawal and a confrontation with a major military offensive. This is not to say that had the US intervened to halt the violations of the Paris Accords and the policies of the GVN had been allowed to proceed, that a stable and viable government would have been established and a reliable base of political support would have been created. It is to say that the policies adopted in the closing years of the war were a step in the right direction. It is also to say that such policies were probably best described as classic examples of "too little, too late."

5. GVN and The United States: An Exercise in Misperception

It is impossible to understand the evolution of the GVN both during and after the period of Ngo Dinh Diem unless one understands the relationship of the GVN and the government of the United States. Some aspects of that relationship have been touched upon in the foregoing review as well as elsewhere in this volume. Other aspects, particularly those relating to political development, deserve additional attention. Throughout much of the period in question the United States practiced what might



best be described as a policy of political paternalism. Political development, like the conduct of the war itself, assumed a predominately American rather than Vietnamese character. "Nation building" was equated with democratization just as modernization became equated with "Americanization."<sup>38/</sup> In the political, as in the military and economic arenas, the United States and its representatives, civilian as well as military, generally proceeded on the assumption that political development meant the establishment of viable democratic institutions. In the area of governance as in the areas of military strategy and tactics, traditional Vietnamese practices and initiatives were, more often than not, regarded as inferior.

The consequences of this paternalistic attitude appear to have been at least as counterproductive on "nation building" as they were on the battlefield.<sup>39/</sup> Attitudes of passivity, deference to American initiatives with respect to the adoption of various "reform" programs, were coupled with the traditional practice of evasion, outright duplicity and a sense of uncertainty as to the practical value of such programs.<sup>40/</sup> Over time, what appears to have developed was a relationship in which external initiatives were entrusted to internal governmental institutions for purposes of implementation. With continued American support presumably hanging in the balance, both sides, US as well as GVN, took refuge in what amounted to a semantic haven wherein what was, was what ought to be, and what ought to be, became what was. As long as the GVN appeared to carry out programs the way we felt they should be carried out we were satisfied. As long as the GVN was free to implement, or not implement, those programs in a way consistent with their experience, priorities and expectations, they too, were satisfied. In effect, a surface passivity and external deference to US advice was, as often as not, coupled with an underlying resentment and suppressed hostility toward American initiatives and pressures to implement those initiatives.

What emerged was a relationship between two governments characterized by two contrasting views concerning the course of political development in South Vietnam. From the US perspective, political development meant the conformity of governmental processes to the institutional or

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organizational structure of the GVN. Conformity to that structure rather than to the political values embedded in the traditional culture constituted "nation building" in American eyes. For understandable reasons, that primacy of structure of political institutions which the US could understand took precedence over the indigenous political culture, many aspects of which were neither as viable or as comprehensible to American representatives or advisors.

From the Vietnamese perspective, political development constituted an adjustment of structure to the indigenous political culture. Required to work within the framework of Western democratic institutions, the various governments of the GVN, and particularly those of Diem and Thieu, approached political development and, by implication, the task of "nation building", as an exercise in making those Western democratic institutions applicable to the traditional political values and culture of Vietnam. Continued reliance of US military and economic support coupled with the exigencies of the war effort precluded the more open and direct forms of adaptation witnessed earlier in post-war Japan, for example, or to cite more recent cases, South Korea and the Philippines. Whether overt or covert, the result was essentially the same. Unfamiliar and essentially alien institutions were operated in conformity with what, from a Vietnamese perspective at least, was a more familiar and acceptable point of reference, namely, the traditional political culture.

It is in the context of these two divergent perspectives, subordination of political culture to Western institutions and subordination of Western institutions to Vietnamese political culture, that many of the frustrations and indeed animosities which characterized the relationships between representatives of the US government and their counterparts in the GVN are best understood. To be sure, factors such as personality, experience, language and personal ambition or the lack thereof all entered the picture. Nevertheless underlying the relationships established at all levels was a divergence of imperatives governing both the evolution and operation of the GVN. Without taking the position that one side was right and the other side wrong, the fact remains that for most of the period of

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US involvement the GVN functioned as a government within a government. In a structural or organizational sense it was, if not a creation of the United States, then an entity created in our image and likeness. In the sense of process it functioned as creature molded in the pervasive context of the traditional Vietnamese political culture.41/

It is no less apparent that just as the US viewed the GVN as an entity created in its image and likeness so too did the GVN, and more particularly the successive leaders of the GVN, view the US government as an extension of their own political practices and experience. The tendency to "mirror-image" more than anything else contributed to the consistent tendency to underestimate the power of the US Congress and the importance of public opinion in sustaining foreign policy commitments. The failure of the GVN leaderships to understand the US political scene, especially in the period immediately prior to the US withdrawal, contributed to the willingness of the Thieu regime to accept the Paris Accords. The prevailing assumption in Saigon was one of unlimited executive power to recommit US forces in the event the accords were violated. Failure to understand the political constraints on the exercise of presidential power played no small role in the disillusionment which prevailed in Saigon during the closing days of the war. It may even be argued that the expectation that the US would respond with air support against the campaign launched by main line forces from the DRV before the fall of Saigon, coupled with the fact that such support was never forthcoming, in no small way contributed to the rapid disintegration of ARVN forces in the face of a determined DRV effort to secure a military victory in South Vietnam.

Although GVN ignorance of the US political system was most vividly demonstrated in the period after the signing of the Paris Accords, there is considerable evidence to suggest that such ignorance pervaded the relationship between the US and the GVN during the entire period of our involvement in South Vietnam and that it permeated that relationship at each and every level. The continued resistance to democratic reforms which began with Diem and continued throughout the final days of the Thieu regime may have been based on a genuine concern for effectively prosecuting the

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war effort. It also, however, reflected a general insensitivity, if not outright disregard for the constellation of forces which, with varying degrees of intensity, shaped the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy. Such insensitivity may have reflected a deliberate decision or a series of decisions to disregard internal political processes at work in the United States. A more plausible interpretation is that those processes and their importance to sustaining continued American involvement in the war effort were never fully appreciated by either Diem or those who succeeded him, a condition which was both fully understood and effectively exploited by Hanoi.

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that over time the GVN became increasingly more sensitive to the domestic political pressures which were shaping the US involvement in South Vietnam. However, periodic experiments with free elections and the frequent promise of political reforms which occurred after the demise of Diem were simply not enough to offset the torture, imprisonment and the repression of political dissent which were manifest in the latter stages of the war effort. Coupled with the obvious comic opera succession of governments which preceded the consolidation of political power by the Thieu regime after 1972, the growing disillusionment of the American people with the entire war effort and the carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign carried out by Hanoi and its various governmental as well as non-governmental allies, these obvious manifestations of a continuing commitment in Saigon to authoritarian rule only served to hasten US withdrawal and the apparent decision to leave the GVN to its own devices.

Taken together these observations concerning the operation of the GVN suggest a continuing, although varying disparity between governmental structure and process during the entire period of US involvement in South Vietnam. Under Diem, this disparity was compensated for by his ability, with the considerable assistance of his family, to convey the impression that he governed with the "mandate of Heaven." As that impression began to fade after 1960, and disappeared entirely with his subsequent assassination, the disparity between democratic structure and authoritarian process

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became increasingly more apparent. The inability of his successors to reclaim the "mandate of heaven," until the closing years of the Thieu regime, conveyed the impression of an illegitimate despotism presided over by a self-serving clique of military officers bent on personal gain. It appears that by 1972, Thieu had achieved considerable success in establishing that the "mandate of heaven" had passed to his regime. By then, however, the primary challenge to the GVN was no longer political. It assumed the form of a conventional military challenge from the DRV. In the absence of US willingness to provide additional military support, no amount of political consolidation could have prevailed against the determined military assault launched and supported from North Vietnam.<sup>42/</sup>

Viewed from another level these observations also suggest that the relationships between the GVN and the US, at least in the political realm, represented a contest of wills guided by two disparate imperatives and two divergent concepts of "nation building." On the US side the consistent demand was for the establishment of a viable democratic government in South Vietnam. The indigenous political culture was to give way to the democratic forms embodied in the governmental structure which surrounded the operation of the GVN. Repeated pressures for free elections, the adoption of a meaningful land reform program, an end to corruption and political repression as well as "government by coup" were only some of the manifestations of our commitment to the subordination of political process to governmental structure. For the US "nation building" embodied a commitment to representative democracy, pure and simple.

For Diem, "nation-building" represented the adaptation of Western democratic institutions to the indigenous political culture. Impervious to US demands for democratic government, he was able, again with considerable help from his family and an early record of considerable accomplishments with respect to restoring order in South Vietnam, to create and preside over a government which represented the triumph of traditional political processes over Western democratic political forms. His successors, for a variety of reasons, were not as successful in resisting US pressures for the conformity of traditional political practices to the organizational

manifestations of representative democracy. Yet their response to these pressures was at best half-hearted as they sought to operate an authoritarian political system without the "mandate of heaven." Unable or unwilling to preside over the transition to democratic government and equally unable to operate an authoritarian system which was considered legitimate and which enjoyed a broad base of popular support, they turned instead to increased reliance on the "mandate of the military" to support the subordination of democratic structure to authoritarian processes. As already noted, by 1972 the Thieu regime showed every sign of acquiring the indispensable attribute for insuring the effective subordination of representative democracy to authoritarian rule, namely the "mandate of heaven." In the absence of an overwhelming military challenge from the DRV, the GVN under Thieu might have succeeded in consolidating political power and establishing a viable, if authoritarian, government. Communist political activity in the South had been effectively neutralized and the Thieu regime showed every sign of being able to succeed where others, except for Diem, had failed. In the final analysis, however, in the absence of a US willingness to re-involve itself in the conflict, it was military force rather than political acumen which decided the transition of the "mandate of heaven" to the "mandate of Marx."<sup>43/</sup>

F. INSIGHTS AND LESSONS

Based on the foregoing analysis it is possible to identify a number of insights and lessons pertaining to the GVN and its relationship to the United States. In the interest of clarity of presentation, the lessons and insights will be divided into two categories. First, there are those which apply to evolution of the GVN itself. And second, there are those which apply to the evolution of the relationship between the GVN and the United States.

1. Evolution of the GVN: Variation on a Common Theme

It was evident that from the outset the commitment of the GVN to the establishment of a representative democracy in South Vietnam was a

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conditional one. In the case of Diem it apparently was conditioned on the retention of personal power, the successful prosecution of the war effort and the subordination of democratic institutions to the political processes rooted in the traditional culture. Following the assassination of Diem, an additional condition entered the picture, namely, the support of the South Vietnamese military. Under Thieu, and particularly during the period after 1972, the commitment to democratic government, although perhaps less dependent on continued military support, remained conditional nevertheless. Thieu, much like Diem, appears to have been willing to subordinate the cause of representative democracy to the retention of personal power and to a successful prosecution of the war effort and the values and processes characteristic of the traditional political culture.

If the commitment to democratic government was conditional, the implementation of that commitment was selective and sporadic at best. It was selective in the sense that, for the most part, it was limited to democratic forms and did not extend to what might be termed the "substance" of representative democracy. In periodic if somewhat less than free elections, political parties were either overshadowed by private associations, as during the Diem regime, or functioned as obedient instruments of the various successor military governments. A parliament which confined itself to ratifying executive decisions rather than initiating legislation or challenging government policies, a series of constitutions which contained provisions for the suspension of normal governmental processes for rule by decree, and the elimination and subsequent partial restoration of popular elections at the village level all attest to the selective nature of the process of building a viable democratic government in South Vietnam.

Leaving aside the question of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of establishing a democratic government in South Vietnam, there is the more fundamental question concerning, particularly after the assassination of Diem, the establishment and maintenance of a viable and effective authoritarian government throughout South Vietnam. To be sure, the requirement to prosecute an ever-increasing counter-insurgency effort provides part of the explanation. The available evidence suggests,

however, that the instability experienced by the GVN between 1960 and 1972 had its roots in the popular perception that Diem had lost the "mandate of heaven" and that those who succeeded him, except perhaps Thieu in the latter stages of his regime, had failed to regain it. That perception, and the resultant denial of legitimacy to the GVN, as much as the war itself, appears to have contributed both to the governmental instability at the national level and the continuing failure to mobilize widespread and genuine popular support for the policies adopted by successive regimes which exercised political power in Saigon.

In a related vein, it is readily apparent that the evolution of the GVN represented a contest between Western political institutions and Vietnamese, or Confucian political values. From a purely indigenous standpoint the ebb and flow of the contest appears to have been influenced less by the maturing situation on the battlefield than by the force of personality of the incumbent leaderships in Saigon. Without the dominating presence of a Diem or, as appeared to be the case after 1972, a Thieu, the contest remained unregulated and a process which would have proven difficult even with an enlightened and determined leadership, which degenerated into a form of anarchy marked by the pursuit of private gain and personal bickering and feuds. From the foregoing insights, certain lessons suggest themselves:

- If Western political institutions are imposed on an Asian political culture, a lengthy and delicate process of adaptation is required.
- To be successful the process requires an enlightened leader or leadership capable of recognizing and resolving the conflicts generated by the disparity of political values produced by the interaction of two very different political cultures.
- In the absence of such a leader or leadership, what would, under any circumstances, prove to be an exceedingly difficult undertaking is likely to assume the quality of an exercise in futility.



2. US - GVN Relations: A Conflict of Priorities and Perspectives

It is abundantly clear in retrospect, that from the outset of our involvement in South Vietnam our relationship with the GVN was dominated by a conflict of priorities and perspectives. Nowhere was that conflict more apparent than in the relative importance assigned to, and respective understanding of, the joint commitment to "nation building." For the United States "nation building" encompassed the establishment of a stable democratic political order in South Vietnam which would serve as a bulwark against communist expansion and as a mechanism for improving the condition of the Vietnamese people.

Throughout the period of US involvement, efforts to achieve a stable, democratic, political system in South Vietnam were essentially indirect. Beginning with Diem, US policy was one of working with the indigenous leadership to develop a stable, democratic GVN. To be sure, the degree of involvement varied over time. Yet, at no time did our commitment to the establishment of representative democracy in South Vietnam embrace the concept of direct and sustained US involvement in the governance of the RVN.

Because our involvement was indirect, the success or failure of US efforts at "nation building" depended both on the quality of the indigenous political leadership and, no less important, on the leverage available to the US for the purpose of influencing that leadership. It is in this context that the long-range consequences of the removal of Ngo Dinh Diem must be understood. Whatever their individual or collective shortcomings, Diem and his immediate family were able, at least until 1960-61, to fashion a stable political order in South Vietnam which enjoyed an aura of legitimacy conferred by his possession of the "mandate of heaven." Moreover, whatever arguments could be made to justify the elimination of Diem and his family, the fact of the matter was, that following his assassination the United States was required to pursue the objective of "nation building" in what, for all intents and purposes, amounted to a political vacuum.

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The problem was compounded by the fact that tacit US support for the removal of Diem significantly reduced whatever leverage we might have possessed to influence the future course of political development in South Vietnam. Finding ourselves tied both morally and, with the passage of time, materially, to whatever leadership emerged from the competition among various military factions, the United States had few incentives short of total withdrawal to impel the reluctant generals to embrace representative democracy. In effect, our commitment to the course of "nation-building" became subordinated to the machinations of the political infighting which marked political life in Saigon. Required to operate with a succession of generals who equated the support of the military with the "mandate of heaven," and denied effective leverage short of total withdrawal from South Vietnam, there was little the United States could do but allow our commitment to "nation building" to be defined and periodically redefined by the exigencies of political and military survival of the GVN and its various military leaders.

It is somewhat ironic, of course, that at the time of the US military withdrawal, the government of Nguyen Van Thieu appears to have mastered the political challenge of the NLF and to have experienced considerable success in regaining the "mandate of heaven." The GVN during this period may not have been democratic by Western standards, but it was at least stable with a growing base of popular support. In the end, the cause of "nation building" was not a victim of political ineptitude. Rather, it fell to the inability of the South Vietnamese to handle a determined military assault from the DRV without US military assistance.

The foregoing analysis of the conflict of priorities and perspectives that attended the long relationship of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam gives rise to these lessons:

- Any external attempt to impose a Western democratic political system on an Asian political culture, if not carried out directly, as in the case of Japan in 1945, will require either an indigenous leadership voluntarily committed to the creation of a democratic order or, the availability of considerable outside

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leverage to compel internal acquiescence to external political demands.

- The absence of one or both conditions is likely to foster the subordination of Western political structures to the indigenous Asian political culture, e.g., South Korea, the Philippines, Republic of China (ROC).

CHAPTER 2 ENDNOTES

1. Central Intelligence Agency, South Vietnam General Survey. National Intelligence Survey, NIS 43D GS (Rev.), October 1969, p. 61. This document was declassified on 13 September, 1979 at BDM's request.
2. JUSPAO Planning Office, Nationwide Hamlet Survey (Second Interim Summary Report - II Corps), JUSPAO Research Report, November 1, 1967, p. 10.
3. Frank Snepp, Decent Interval (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 56. Snepp and others suggest that by 1972 Nguyen Van Thieu had gone a long way toward establishing a viable and stable, although by no means democratic, government in South Vietnam. For treatments of the concept of "mandate of heaven" as well as other aspects of tradition of Vietnamese political cultures see Allan E. Goodman, Politics in War (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).
4. A succinct examination of the introduction of democratic precepts to the area is found in Nguyen Duy Hinh, and Tran Dinh Tho, The South Vietnamese Society, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History (McLean, Virginia: General Research Corporation, December 1978), pp. 122-128.
5. John T. McAlister and Paul Mus, The Vietnamese and Their Revolution (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1970), p. 55.
6. Nghiem Dang, Vietnam: Politics and Public Administration (Honolulu, East-West Center Press, 1966), pp. 29-35. For further discussion of the French legacy and Vietnam's governmental structures see Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), Chapter 3.
7. Roy Jumper and Marjorie Weiner Normand, "Vietnam, South Vietnam: The Contemporary Setting" Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia, 2nd ed., George McTurnan Kahin, ed. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 412. As the French became less and less able to combat the communist insurgency, they appealed to the South Vietnamese to marshal the country's resources in support of its independence. General de Lattre in his July 11, 1951 Call to Vietnamese Youth suggests that it is the duty of Vietnamese youth to take up the struggle against the insurgents.
8. Harvey H. Smith, et al., Area Handbook for South Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, September 1962), pp. 222-223.

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9. Bui Diem, former GVN Ambassador to the US, commented that he believed Diem to have been a good man whose failure was in his too personal style of governance. He continued that while Diem did not like the Nhuts, and therefore was tempted to remove them from their powerful positions, he was a most stubborn man, and he had become accustomed to working through them. BDM interview with Bui Diem in Washington, D.C., June 8, 1979. Additionally, the Vietnamese generals, Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho in the GRC monograph, The South Vietnamese, paint a picture of the GVN under Diem that is most sympathetic to the leader. He is even likened to Ho Chi Minh as he is described as a man who "was imbued with revolutionary ideals, gave up position and wealth, and led a life of celibacy" (pp. 134-135). The authors note, however, that Diem made two tragic errors: he relied too heavily on his brothers, one of whom, Mr. Nhu, was married to the despised Mme. Nhu, and Diem's prestige became tarnished by this association; secondly, Diem held an unyielding attitude toward the Buddhists (p. 139). See also pp. 170-171.
10. A major characteristic of Diem's regime was the underrepresentation of some regions in the country, especially the southern, Mekong Delta area. Regionalism became an important factor in South Vietnam's social and political life - this kind of discrimination on the basis of region became one more example in the eyes of some Vietnamese of the corrupt nature of the GVN. See GRC monograph, The South Vietnamese Society, pp. 130-131.
11. South Vietnam: A Political History, Keesings Research Report (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 29-30.
12. Francois Sully, We the Vietnamese (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 179. See also GRC monograph, The Vietnamese Society, pp. 140-143 for details on political and social upheavals following Diem's assassination.
13. For further discussion of the succession of coups leading to the Ky-Thieu government, see Nguyen Cao Ky, Twenty Years and Twenty Days (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), pp. 45-69.
14. Within the Committee, General Nguyen Van Thieu served as chairman. He was also Chief of State. The most powerful figure, however, was Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, who was head of the Central Executive Committee. The functions of this committee included coordination, supervision and initiation of basic government policies. Comprising five ministers, this important committee was often referred to as the "war cabinet" or the "supercabinet."

See The Vietnamese Society for examination of Thieu-Ky regime, pp. 144-153. Note especially the 1971 presidential elections in which Thieu was criticized for undermining the elections in order to maintain his

"one man show." Increasingly restrictive legislation was passed, thus leading to the criticism that under Thieu the nation was regressing from democracy.

15. Harvey H. Smith, p. 204.
16. South Vietnam: General Survey, National Intelligence Survey 43 D (1969), p. 63.
17. Snapp, p. 56.
18. Smith, p. 226.
19. Goodman, p. 105.
20. The complex political dynamics within Vietnamese society made very difficult the development of a political system with democratic underpinnings. The several levels of political development of Vietnam's various social and political subgroups helped to preclude democratization of the political process. See the National Intelligence Survey, South Vietnam pp. 72-78 for details on the religious and other minority subgroups comprising the country's political spectrum.
21. President Johnson's determination to make South Vietnam into a democratic state is reflected in statements made at the Honolulu Conference in February 1966. Nguyen Cao Ky in his book, Twenty Years and Twenty Days, writes of the meeting, "I can still see him stabbing his finger at each paragraph of the communique issued by both the US and South Vietnam in reaffirmation of 'the principle of the self-determination of peoples and of government by the consent of the governed,' as he reviewed it point by point in his salty Texas style, glancing in turn at the appropriate minister and officials, making it clear to everyone beyond any doubt that he wanted not just words but action on building the new Vietnam." Johnson reportedly questioned "How have you built democracy in the rural areas? How much of it have you built, when, and where? Give us dates, times, numbers," pp. 82-84.
22. Charles A. Joiner, The Politics of Massacre: Political Processes in South Vietnam (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 17.
23. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 12.
24. William C. Westmoreland, "Vietnam in Perspective: The Retired Officer," (October 1978), p. 21. A fascinating account of the coup d'etat of November 1, 1963 when Diem was deposed is provided in a serialized chronicle of the coup which first appeared in the Saigon newspaper Lap Truong between June 4 and July 31, 1971. The original title of this account was "From the Day of the First Republic's Overthrow to

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the Day the Second Republic of Vietnam was founded." The account is unique in that it was written by a Vietnamese, an aide to Tran Van Don, for a Vietnamese audience, and so it is unlike most other versions of the coup. This serialized account of the coup proposes that its cause originated from the one party leadership system of government of the First Republic. It reviews the US position regarding Diem and the domestic political conditions within South Vietnam which precipitated the coup. Private files of Col. Lucien Conein provided to BDM, Aug. 1979.

25. In the meantime, as the GVN became weakened, the communist insurgents' strength grew. General W. C. Westmoreland, COMUSMACV, wrote in his Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964-June 1968, pp. 84/5, "Capitalizing on disorder and demoralization in the government, the enemy revitalized his Administrative Liberation Associations at hamlet and village level and renamed them Autonomous Administrative Committees."
26. Furthermore, much of the general population evinced little knowledge of or interest in the government's activities. Opinion surveys concerning the general public's attitudes on a wide range of topics were conducted throughout the mid to late 1960s. One survey taken in October-November-December 1968 queried "From what you have heard, seen or read about can you tell me anything that the Government of Vietnam has done in the last weeks that you like or approve of?" In the months October, November and December, 44%, 32% and 45% respectively answered 'Don't Know' to the question. Responses to the query "Do you feel that the present political parties in South Vietnam do or do not reflect most of the chief aspirations of the people?" demonstrated an equally low level of public interest in and awareness of government structures and activities. Sixty two percent of the general public responded in October that they 'didn't know' whether or not the existing parties were reflective of popular aspirations. On the other hand responses from what the pollsters termed the 'elite' section of the population exhibited a greater sense of political awareness with 46% answering that the existing parties do not reflect the people's aspirations and with 41% responding that they did not know. See the following: The Center for Vietnamese Studies, Opinion Survey (U), 1968 (Center for Vietnam Studies, 1968), pp. 5, 24, 42 and 44; JUSPAO, National Urban Public Opinion (U) (JUSPAO: Saigon, January 1966), p. 2, note especially the differences in urban and rural populations' understanding of the government system; Ministry of Information and Chieu-Hoi, Post-Election Survey (Saigon: Directorate of Programs and Documentation, November 1966).
27. Dang, p. 5.
28. Under pressure from the US, village elections were instituted in 1967 with the purpose of consolidating the popular base of the regime. However, as the war had compelled most of the village male elite to

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leave to fight, there remained few village-born popular candidates. "Most of those who posed for candidature did not belong to the class of village elite who commanded popular respect; some were even suspected of being sympathetic to the other side." Hence the candidates for village office belonged either to a group of people who were sponsored by the province governments or to groups with local religious associations, whose interests were less in representing the total population and more in promoting their separate special interests. See Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflection on the Vietnam War. Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History (McLean, Va.: General Research Corporation, December 1978), pp. 63-64.

29. John Paul Vann, an authority on counterinsurgency and former Foreign Service Officer (Reserve within the USOM), in a paper Harnessing the Revolution in Vietnam written in September 1965 describes the failure of the GVN to appeal to the rural population. He calls for a reorientation of the country's leaders such that they will seek the development of a broad political base among the people. Concerning the rural South Vietnamese, Vann writes:

The existing government is oriented toward the exploitation of the rural and lower class urban populations. It is, in fact, a continuation of the French colonial system of government with upper-class Vietnamese replacing the French. Although the wealth of the country lies in its agricultural production, it is the agrarian population which is realizing the least out of either the technological advancements of the twentieth century or the massive assistance provided by the US (p. 4).

John Paul Vann's papers were made available to BDM by Dr. Vincent Davis for the purpose of this study.

30. Goodman, pp. 22-23.
31. Ibid., p. 24.
32. John P. Vann in his work on civil reforms, Harnessing the Revolution in Vietnam, stressed the importance to the successful outcome of US objectives in Vietnam of laying the foundation for a more representative style of government and a unified chain of command down to the Province Chief. Vann was concerned specifically that the GVN be strengthened at the village and district levels. He feared the negation of military success by the failure of the GVN to win popularity among its own people. His proposal for dealing with this problem was presented to various US Government officials and involved increasing the authority of province Chiefs within three or more specified "test" regions. Essentially, Vann's proposal called for steamlining



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decentralization of authority from the Saigon ministries administrative practices at the province levels and for extending the "country team" concept to the province and district levels.

33. Joiner, p. 34. Furthermore, the extent of disagreement and the tensions within the various Vietnamese nationalist parties were so great as to preclude the establishment of a much needed alliance. In addition, "Among the young, emergent leaders, very few had any stature or prestige." See The South Vietnamese Society, pp. 160-165.
34. Kahn, p. 412.
35. Samuel L. Popkin, "Pacification: Politics and the Village," Asian Survey, No. 10 (August 1970), p. 664; See also The Viet Cong Political Infrastructure in South Vietnam, a SEATO short paper-55, from the library of Douglas Pike. This paper provides detailed information on the NLFSV, its organization, programs, policies and development of the PRG. See also, Michael Charles Conley, The Communist Insurgent Infrastructure in South Vietnam: A Study of Organization and Strategy (Washington, D.C.: The American University). Also, see Volume I, The Enemy, Chapter 3 for further information on the communist political infrastructure in South Vietnam.

General W. C. Westmoreland in Report on Operations equates the Tet offensive with Pearl Harbor in terms of its effects upon the GVN. The attack strengthened the government, and the will to fight against the insurgents was increased.
36. Snapp, p. 53.
37. Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 342-353.
38. Goodman, p. 105.
39. Some contend that the credibility and prestige of South Vietnam as an independent state were called into question after 1963 when the "towering and conspicuous role of the US as a 'big brother' gave the impression that everything had been preordained by the US," See The South Vietnamese Society, pp. 168-169.
40. Stephen T. Hosmer, et al., The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1978), pp. 28-31.
41. Duncanson, pp. 343-345.
42. Hosmer, p. 14.
43. Ibid., p. XVIII.

CHAPTER 3  
CLIMATE, GEOGRAPHY AND TRANSPORTATION

The weather during Operation DELAWARE was almost unbelievably bad. Heavy clouds, fog, thunder storms, and low ceilings made heroic feats of airmanship almost commonplace. Not only were the conditions bad in the area of tactical operations, but even the departure area from Camp Evans had conditions which usually forced our helicopters to climb up through an overcast on instruments, reassemble a formation on top of the clouds, fly to the target area, and then search for some sort of hole in the clouds to make their descent. What should have been a simple twenty-minute flight was usually an hour and twenty minutes of stark terror.1/

LTG John J. Tolson

The hot, humid climate made refrigeration vital and air conditioning more a necessity than a luxury. Refrigeration was required for a multitude of things from medical supplies to flashlight batteries. Air conditioning became almost as necessary for the men working inside the sweltering administrative buildings.2/

MGEN Robert R. Ploger

A. INTRODUCTION

South Vietnam enjoys relatively uniform temperature throughout the year and is subject to heavy annual rainfall dominated by the Northeast and Southwest monsoons. Typhoons occasionally strike the littorals of the South China Sea. In addition to setting parameters for viable agricultural pursuits, these conditions affect military operations and lines of communications.

This chapter does not present an exhaustive discussion and analysis of geography and climate in South Vietnam or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Applicable National Intelligence Surveys are available to those who require detailed information. Rather, this chapter limits itself to presenting a broad perspective of geography and climate as they influenced military operations.

B. CLIMATE

Vietnam has a tropical climate, generally hot in the lowlands and somewhat cooler in the mountains. Heavy monsoon rainfall blankets the Mekong Delta and piedmont areas in the summer and the areas north and east of the mountains in the winter. See Map 3-1.3/ Observation, off-road movement, aerial flight, communications and logistic operations deteriorate markedly in areas affected by the monsoons.

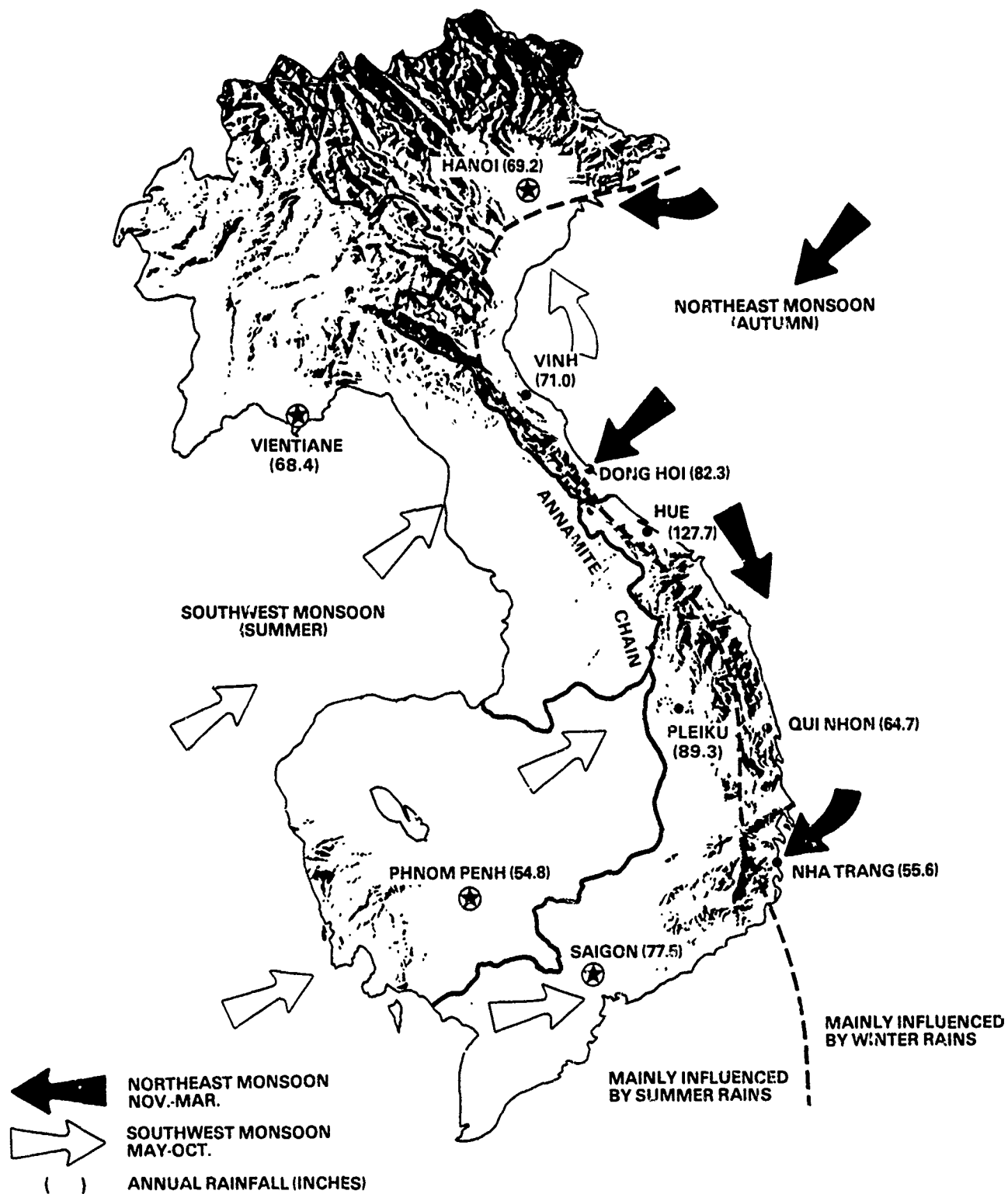
Heavy cloud cover stacks up in front of the Annamite Chain during the northeast monsoon, blanketing the northeast half of South Vietnam. This phenomenon, called the "crachin" by the French, is accompanied by extensive fog, light rains, and limited visibility, and is particularly intense in November and December. Air operations are inhibited during the period, although helicopters normally can operate between rain squalls and under the cloud layer. Air operations of any kind are hazardous in the mountains during periods of heavy overcast.

During early US operations in Vietnam, considerable difficulty was experienced in gathering weather data for accurate forecasts to support military operations. The field-expedient solution was use of Special Forces A Detachments located in each corps area for gathering and reporting the required data.4/

The effect of the Vietnamese climate on military operations in South Vietnam is described succinctly in the Department of the Army Vietnam Studies series:

Layers of fine dust generated by heavy supply convoys traveling over unsurfaced roads during the dry months become a thick impassable quagmire as the rainy season begins. Heavy rainfall saturates and erodes all but the most carefully compacted and protected soil. Unpaved runways and storage areas become unusable. Lowland floods prevent cross-country movement by wheeled vehicles, and even tracked vehicles become road bound. Small streams become raging torrents washing out bridges, flooding over dams, carrying away roads, and clogging culverts with silt and mud. Bivouac areas are flooded, and fields of fire cleared during the dry months suddenly fill with lush foliage concealing

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SOURCE: Based on CIA, Indochina Atlas  
Map 3-1. Climate

ground movement beyond friendly perimeters. The persistent moisture causes shoe leather, tentage, and clothing to rot. Typhoons and squalls endanger shipping at exposed anchorages, snap ship-to-shore fuel lines, and make unloading operations virtually impossible. But the weather has the most significant effect on flight operations.

The dry season turns the countryside into a hot still oven. The dust generated by helicopters, airplanes, trucks, and earth-moving equipment gets into everything. Unless constant maintenance is carried on, dust wears out engines, clogs fuel and lubrication systems, wears out delicate moving parts, and settles into food and open wounds causing an entirely new series of infections and diseases. Heat debilitates combat and construction troops, and work slows down.5/

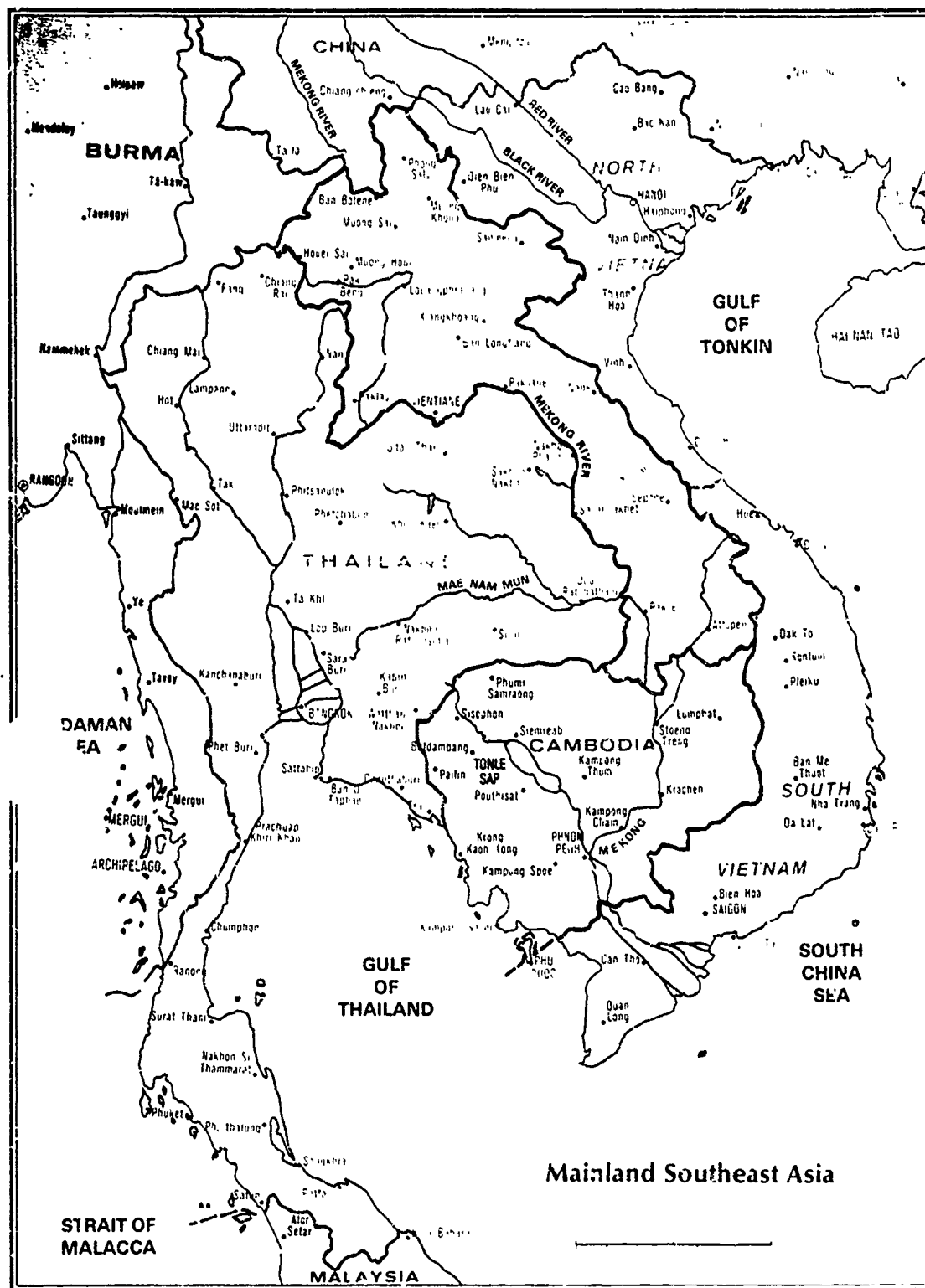
The climate of the entire mainland Southeast Asian region also influenced military operations, particularly those operations directed against North Vietnam and enemy forces in Laos and Cambodia.6/ The weather at airbases in South Vietnam and Thailand as well as at sea often differed substantially from that in designated target areas. Aerial reconnaissance, surveillance, and photography are severely curtailed during periods when cloud cover predominates in the various areas.

## C. GEOGRAPHY

### 1. General

South Vietnam lies in the southeastern part of former French Indochina. (See Map 3-2.) The fact that North Vietnam is bordered by the People's Republic of China to the north, by Laos to the west and by the Gulf of Tonkin to the east, proved greatly significant to military operations throughout Southeast Asia during the second Indo-China war. In addition, the Laotian Panhandle and Cambodia, west of South Vietnam, provided sanctuaries for North Vietnam. The demilitarized zone (DMZ) at the 17th Parallel separated the two Vietnams from 1954 until 1975.

The land area of Vietnam is dominated by a jungle-covered mountain range, the Annamite Chain, which is narrow, irregular and rugged in the North, and the lower Central Highlands Plateau in the South. To the west of that chain, the Mekong River flows out of the high plateau of Tibet



Mainland Southeast Asia

4541/78W

SOURCE: Standard DoD map  
Map 3-2. Mainland Southeast Asia

as one of four great rivers that provide Pacific drainage for Asia. The Mekong separates Laos and Thailand before flowing into Cambodia and finally emerges in several tributaries through the delta of South Vietnam, where it empties into the South China Sea, 2800 miles from its source.

2. Topography

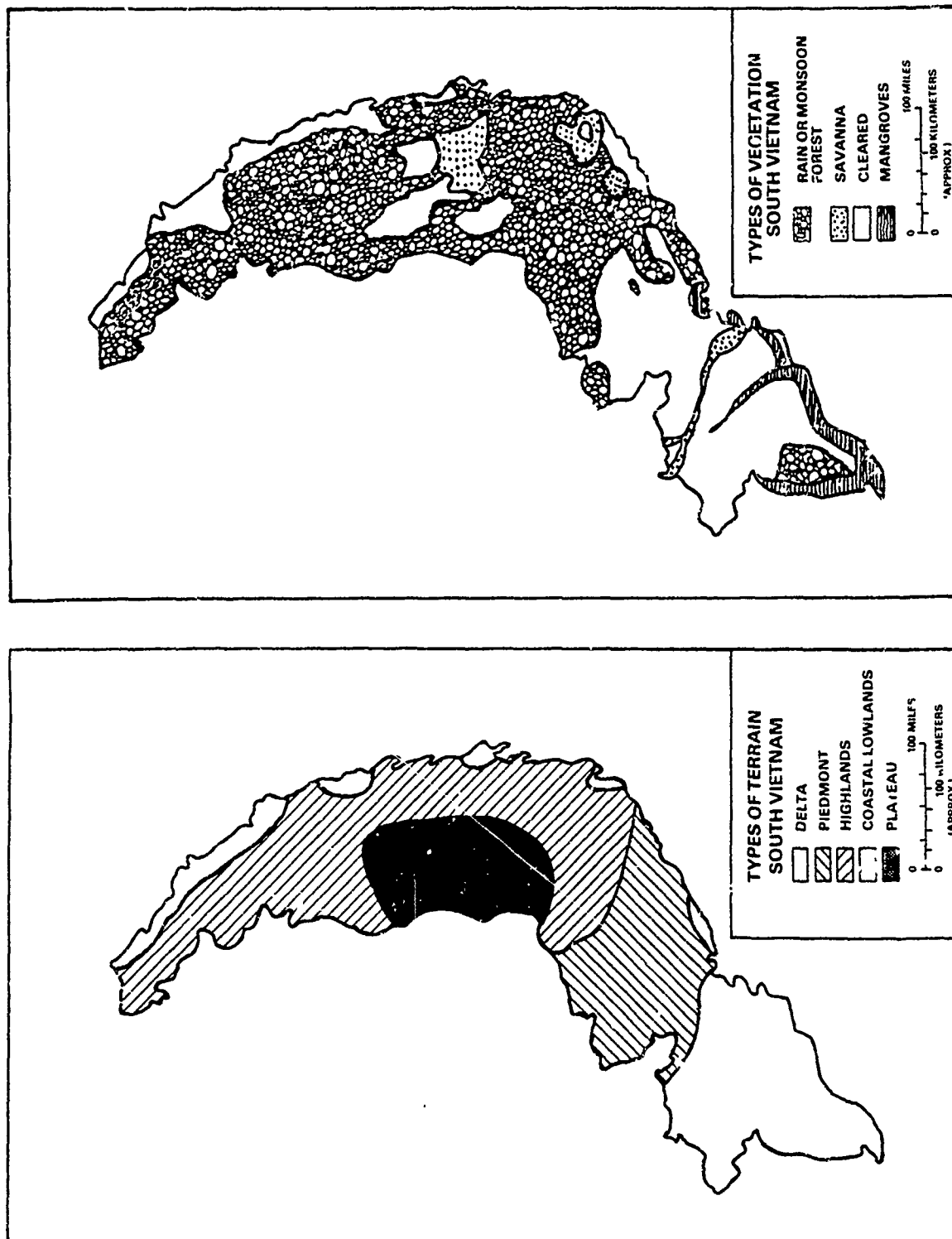
The overall topography of Vietnam includes mountains, deltas, and plains. See Map 3-3.7/ The mountain chain of southern China continues as the Annamite Chain and thrusts south into the Indochina peninsula, forming the rugged and unmarked boundary between Vietnam and Laos. This heavily forested spine poses a massive barrier to cross-border travel except at certain strategic passes. The dense forests and triple canopy make parachute operations impractical.

Communist forces in South Vietnam and in nearby sanctuary areas gained a well-deserved reputation for the excellence of their tunnels. The terrain of the mountains, high hills, and piedmont proved to be suitable for construction of tunnels ranging from small, individual holes beneath their huts to massive underground logistic installations, hospitals, and training areas. Conversely, the wet sand and soil of coastal areas and the delta were not suitable for tunneling without shoring or cementing the tunnels, a technique in which the PLAF became adept.

The distinctive zones of Vietnam of almost impenetrable jungles, forested mountains, and swamps dictated how military personnel and equipment could be employed. It presented a formidable challenge to any foreign country trying to conduct a war there, as proven by France's experience as well as ours. On the other hand, the enemy was at home and exploited the natural features to their advantage.

3. Military Geographic Regions

The Geneva Agreement of 1954 established a demilitarized zone astride the Ben Hai river at approximately the 17th parallel, effectively dividing Vietnam into two separate and antagonistic states. South Vietnam retained the old French military territorial organization until after the French departed. That organization had three military regions (MR); a fourth MR comprised most of North Vietnam. Each region was divided into



SOURCE: Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies Series, and CIA, Indochina Atlas

Map 3-3. Topography

4541/78W



sectors which were defined by provincial boundaries. In 1958 three corps headquarters were created to control assigned infantry divisions in fighting any invasion by the North Vietnamese Army. A new military region was added to contend with rising insurgency in the heavily populated delta.

In 1961, several significant reorganization efforts were made to achieve unity of command and to place particular emphasis on pacification. South Vietnam was divided into four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ), each placed under the control of an army corps. (See Map 3-4.) Each CTZ was in turn divided into Division Tactical Areas (DTA), for which subordinate infantry divisions were responsible.<sup>8/</sup> Formal DTA's were abolished in 1970, ostensibly to free the divisions from territorial responsibility and gain mobility.

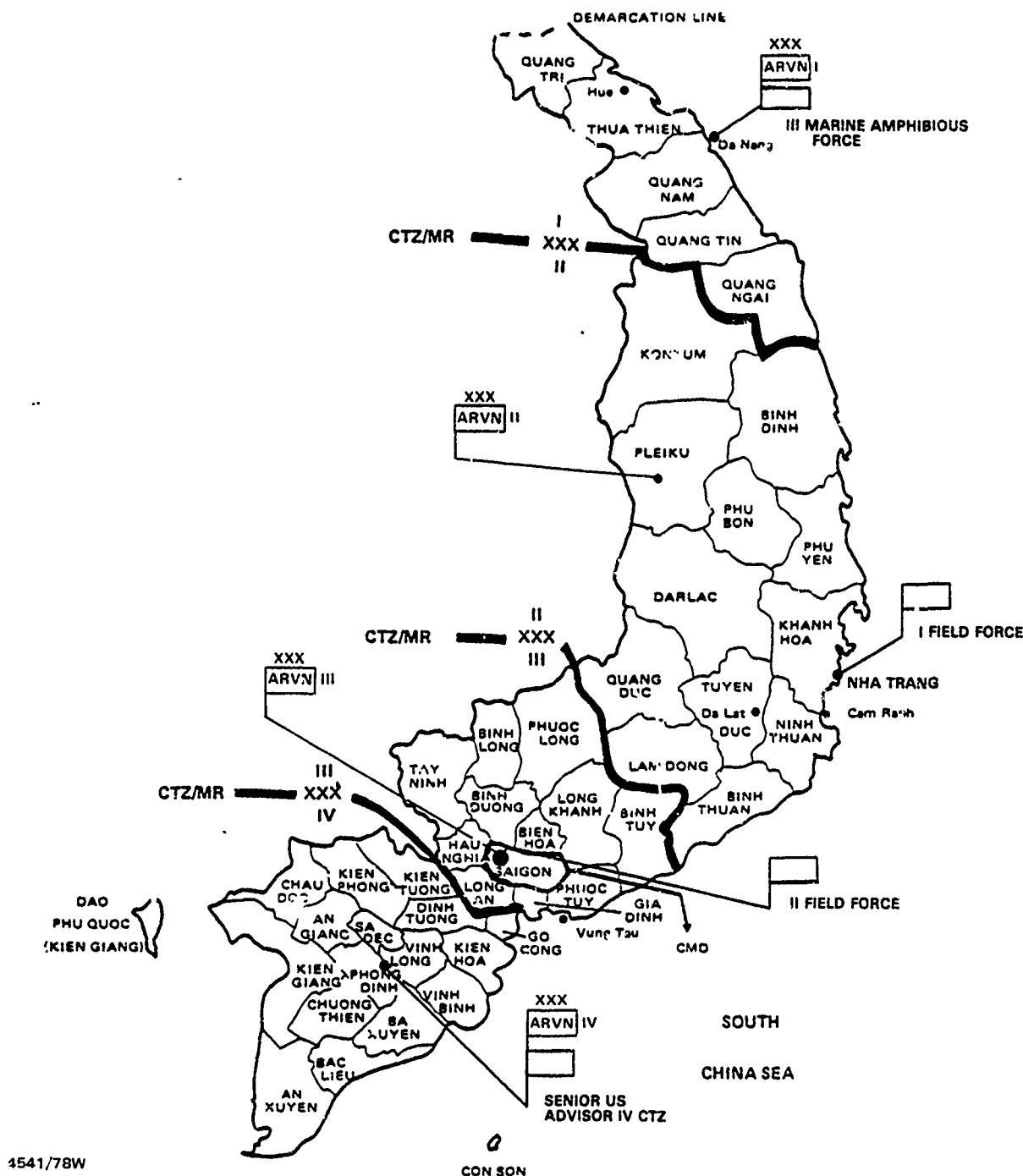
With the US force buildup, US Corps or Field Force headquarters were established to exercise operational control over assigned forces and serve as a counterpart to the Vietnamese Corps/Military Region (CTZ/MR) structure.

Since no major US forces were introduced into the IV Corps area initially, the advisory group there continued under the operational control of the MACV commander.<sup>9/</sup>

#### 4. Strategic Areas

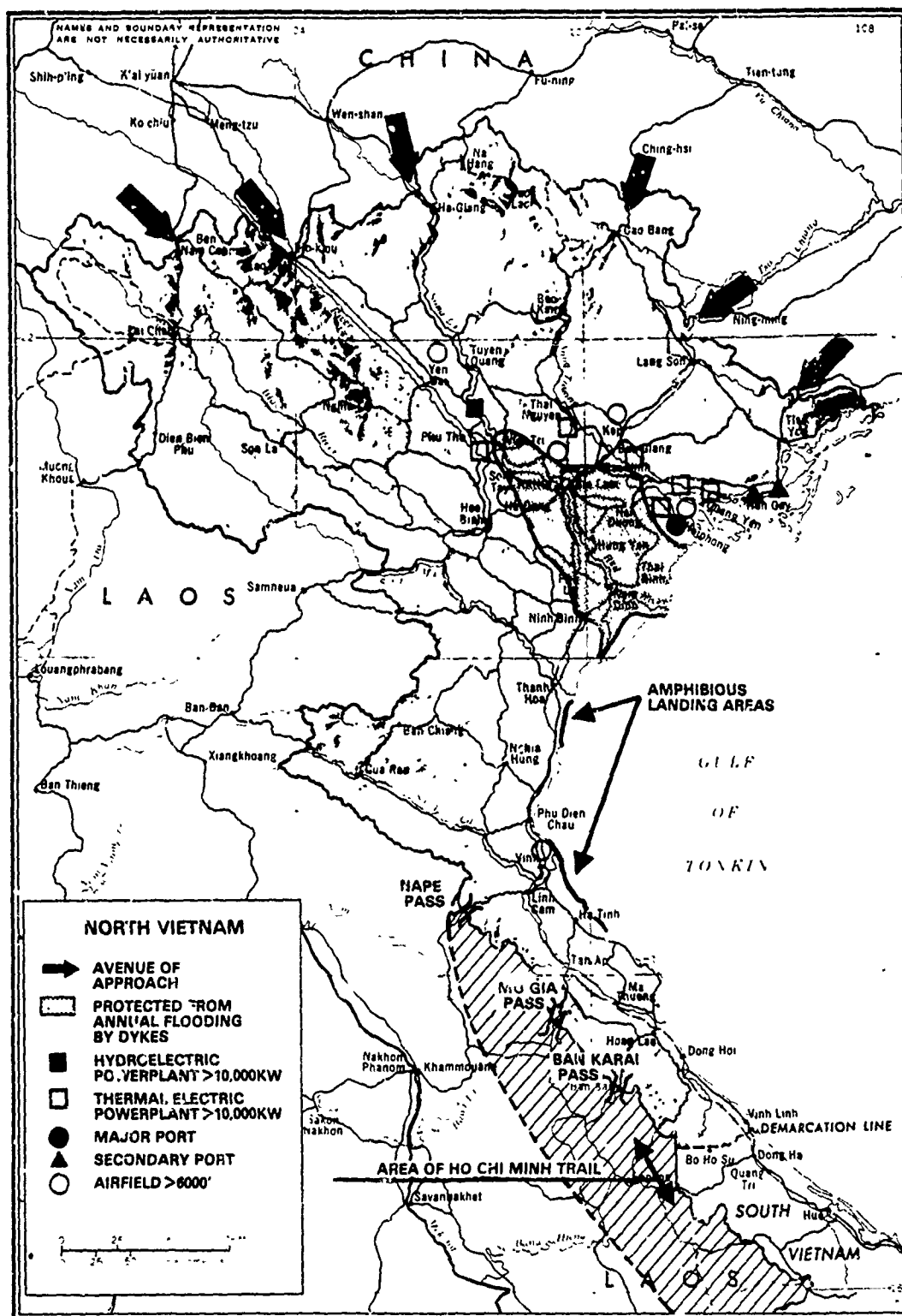
##### a. North Vietnam <sup>10/</sup>

From the North Vietnamese standpoint, their most strategic area is the Red River Delta, which includes the political heart of North Vietnam, Hanoi, and the major port city of Haiphong. (See Map 3-5.) The bulk of the North's industry and agriculture are found in the Delta. Since the natural land routes into Vietnam are from the north (China) rather than the west, the mountainous northern border has great strategic significance. Another area of great importance to the North Vietnamese is the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex in Laos along the western slopes of the Annamite Chain. The North Vietnamese have controlled that area since the early 1950's, transforming it from a primitive mountain-jungle wilderness into a sophisticated artery of roads and way stations complete with POL pipeline service. The sanctuary afforded them by use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail was an important factor during hostilities with American forces; it was decisive after 1973.



SOURCE: Indochina Refugee Authored Monographs

Map 3-4. Military Geographic Regions, 1966



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Map 3-5. Strategic Areas of North Vietnam

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The mountain passes at Nape and Mu Gia which lead from North Vietnam into Laos at the northern end of the Ho Chi Minh Trail had strategic significance for the Second Indochina War. The PAVN provided heavy air defense fires at both passes to protect them from US air attack.

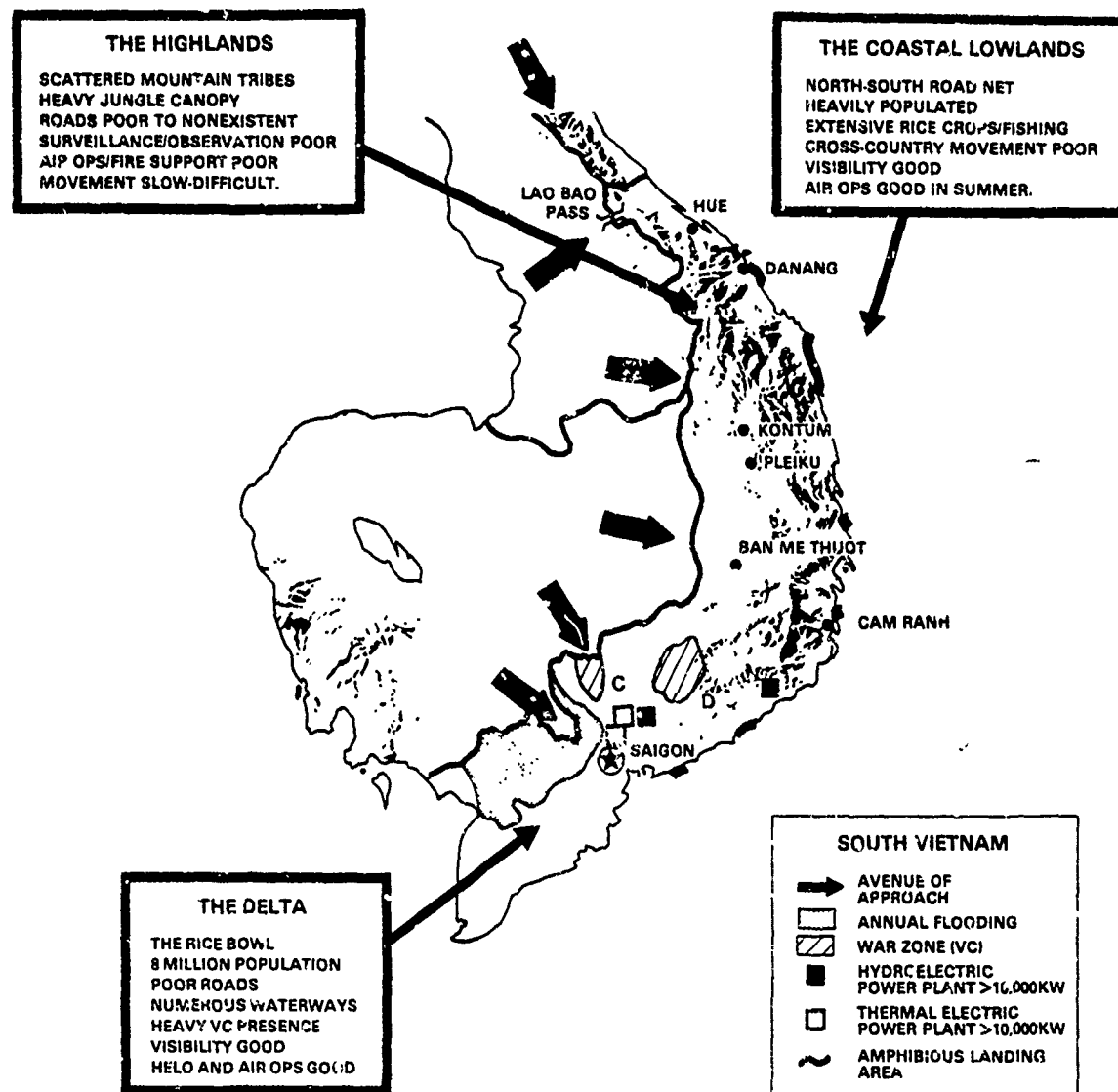
### b. South Vietnam

The area immediately south of the demilitarized zone was vitally important in defending the Republic of Vietnam, particularly the ancient capital of Hue, which has historic and psycho-sociological significance. The major land routes into the Republic are from the north through the DMZ. Entry from the west is difficult for major forces except through Lao Bao and other lesser passes. Numerous trails exist, however, which are suitable for infiltration by small groups. The sea to the east provides an easy route for gaining entry to all of coastal Vietnam. (See Map 3-6.)11/

The Central Highlands, which include Dakto, Kontum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, and Dalat, overlook the few lines of communication entering from Laos and provide access to the coastal plain. Control of these Highlands is essential to a defense of the central coastline and of Saigon itself.

The Cam Ranh Bay military installation grew from a field-expedient, aluminum-mat airfield in 1965 to a major port and supply center by 1967, and it shared with Saigon a strategic role in the logistic support of US and South Vietnamese forces. Saigon has long been one of the great ports of Southeast Asia. It has the added distinction of being the political heart of South Vietnam, vesting it with unequalled strategic importance. Tan Son Nhut airport, outside Saigon, grew to be one of the busiest in the world during combat operations in Vietnam.

The Mekong Delta, which once produced enough rice both to feed all of Vietnam, and to export, hosts nearly half the population of South Vietnam and its agricultural importance undeniably gives the Delta a strategic role.



SOURCE: National Intelligence Survey, South Vietnam, and BDM Analysis

Map 3-6. Strategic Areas of South Vietnam

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### c. Other Strategic Areas

#### 1) Laos

Laos provided a convenient sanctuary. In the late 1950's and early 1960's the neutral and rightist Laotians demonstrated their inability to prevent the NVA from using Laotian territory. It was during that period that North Vietnamese service troops established the main supply route known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. (See Map 3-7. Also see Volume I, Chapter 5 of this study).

To the North Vietnamese, Laos was a buffer to Thailand and an avenue to the south. The NVA used the Ho Chi Minh Trail to deploy large numbers of troops, supplies, materiel and equipment to be used against American and South Vietnamese forces during the war.

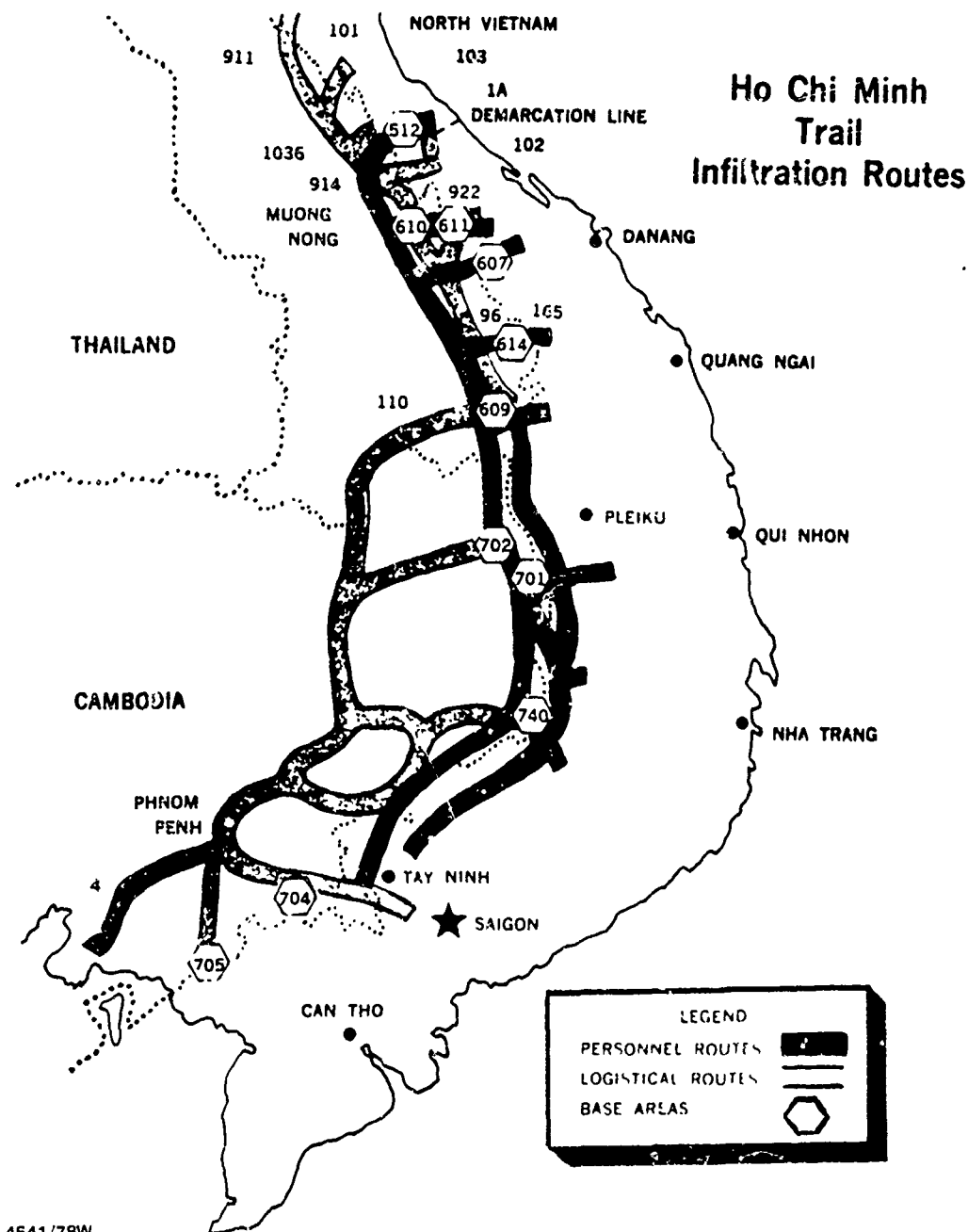
To the South Vietnamese, Laos was a source of constant danger. The rugged border area harbored NVA combat units and provided avenues of approach into the Republic of Vietnam.

In particular, the road and trail network in eastern Laos provides access to the strategic Central Highlands Plateau in South Vietnam and the key cities of Kontum, Pleiku, and Ban Me Thuot.

#### 2. Cambodia

Throughout early hostilities in South Vietnam, Cambodia ostensibly remained neutral. The Khmer Rouge threat within Cambodia was somewhat restrained and appeared not to pose a mortal threat to Cambodia's ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The prince found it expedient to accommodate the DRV, however, in order to maintain his uneasy rule. Supplies bound for PAVN and PLAF units flowed through Kompong Som (Sihanoukville) and thence to using-units or supply caches, generally in border areas fronting on III and IV CTZ/MR of South Vietnam.<sup>12/</sup> In this sense, Cambodia provided the main supply routes for communist forces in the southern half of RVN while the Ho Chi Minh Trail was the means for supplying those units in the northern half of the republic. The strategic value to the DRV and the strategic threat posed to the RVN were considerable.

Prince Sihanouk was deposed in absentia in 1970. The government of Lon Nol assumed power, and the strategic threat to South Vietnam was temporarily removed. The tactical threat remained.



SOURCE: Extracted from The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, Carl Berger, ed.

Map 3-7. Ho Chi Minh Trail

D. TRANSPORTATION

1. General

In 1964 by US standards South Vietnam had only the most primitive communications systems. The country's infrastructure was totally incapable of supporting a modern military force armed with sophisticated equipment. Prior to the commitment of major US ground combat forces, the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) outlined a set of priorities to accommodate their possible introduction;

At the beginning of 1965 the Army command in Vietnam drew up a set of plans suggesting priorities for a large-scale construction program in the event of a large troop buildup. Airfields were considered of vital importance. General Westmoreland realized that aviation would play a key role in jungle warfare, and the mobility of troops and supplies could very well depend upon the availability of airfields at strategic points throughout the country. Next in importance were the construction and maintenance of supply routes - roads and railroads that would provide the Army with safe routes for convoy travel and give the citizens of South Vietnam the means to bring produce to market. Port facilities were ranked third. Finally, logistic bases and support facilities were to be built. The theme of the entire program was to be austerity and utility; no money was to be wasted and every ounce of material was to be used.<sup>13/</sup>

Despite the listing of priorities, there was no base development planning group at Department of the Army or Department of Defense in 1965 to determine requirements for electric power generation and distribution, port and airfield construction, POL storage and distribution, and a host of other urgent logistic needs. There were not sufficient logistic support units available in the active forces to accomplish the logistical build up that was needed prior to the introduction of major combat forces. The tactical decision to bring in combat troops ahead of support units was necessitated by the enemy situation and political decisions which greatly complicated the problem of logistic and construction support.<sup>14/</sup>



2. Railroads

The South Vietnamese railroad system includes nearly 800 miles of main and branch lines. (See Map 3-8.) The main line follows the coastline from Saigon to Dong Ha, and its roadbed continues north to Hanoi. During the First Indochina War, 1945-1954, saboteurs destroyed most of the 413 bridges; the stations, depots, and workshops; and nearly two-thirds of the rolling stock in South Vietnam.

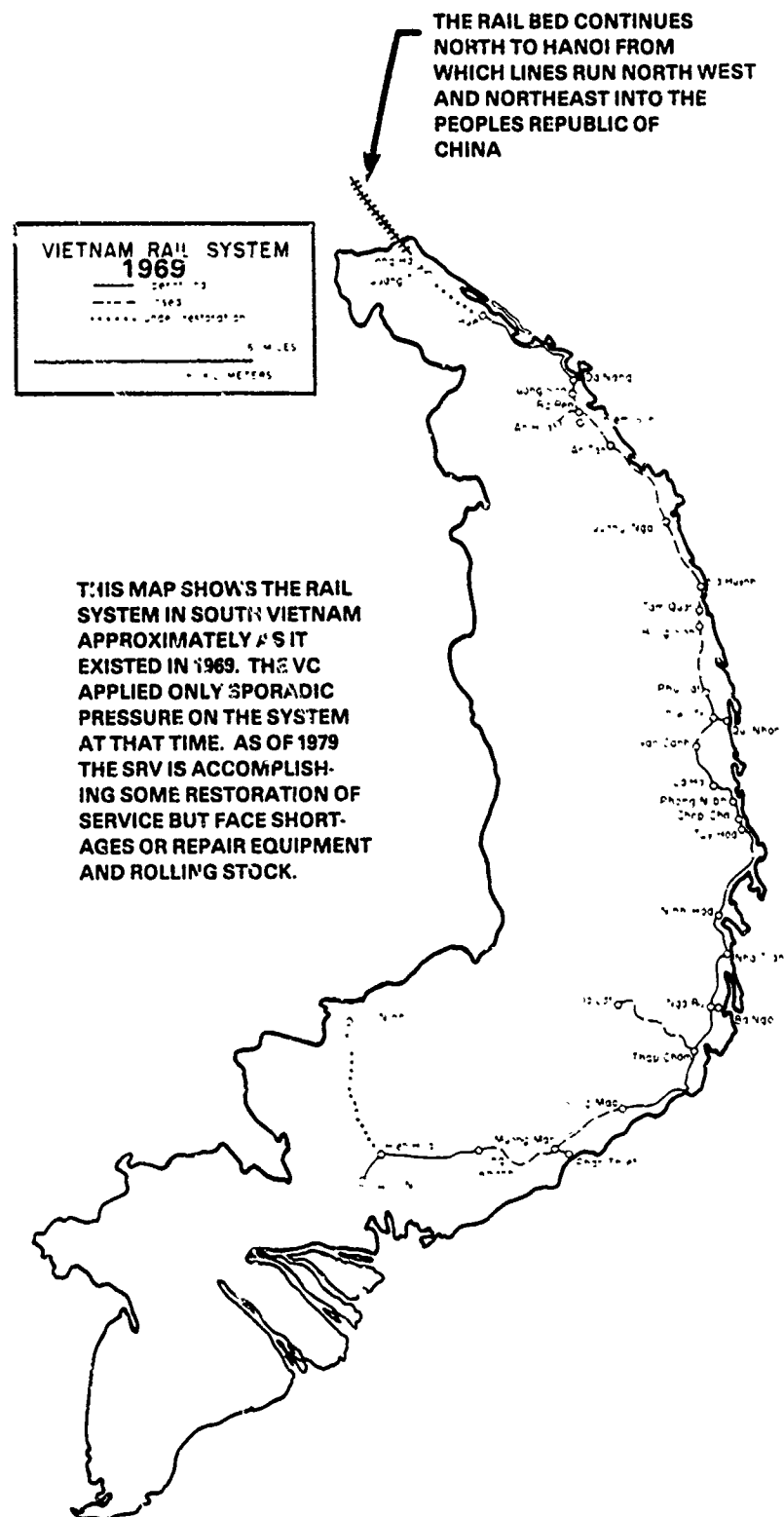
Restoration of the rail system began in 1966 under joint Vietnamese/US auspices. While sections of the track remained operable, notably in the Saigon-Bien Hoa area and some stretches along the coast between Nha Trang and Danang, rarely was more than 400 fragmented miles of track usable. The enemy continued to target the railroad and prevent it from being fully operable. Rock aggregate was required in massive quantities for building roads, airfields, and hard stands, and the railroad figured prominently in hauling the needed rock.

In sum, the South Vietnamese railroad augmented other means of transportation but never was capable of bearing a major logistic burden. In a peacetime environment and with substantial restoration and continuing maintenance, the railroad can assume a major role in north-south long-haul commerce.

3. Highways-Roads

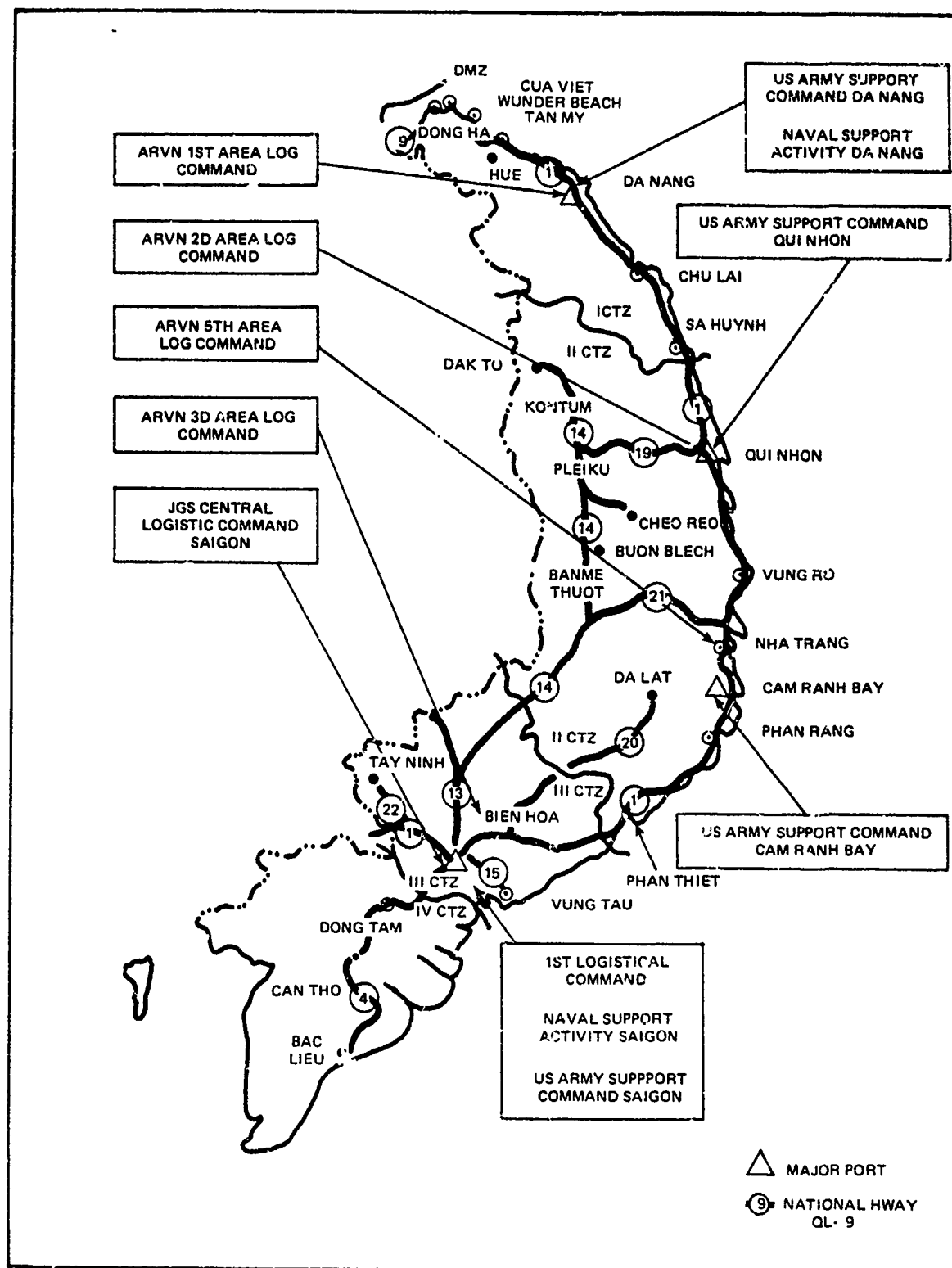
The highway system in the Republic of Vietnam was generally adequate to meet local needs at the end of World War II. About 4000 miles of national or interprovincial asphalt or macadamized roads were usable. Some 8000 miles of road were rural or secondary.

Since 1936, two principal highways have connected Saigon with the north: the old Mandarin route follows the coast where once it had joined Saigon and Hanoi and then continued on into China; the Highlands route connects the plateaus of the Central Highlands with Saigon. Three connecting east-west highways link the two principal north-south routes, providing Kontum, Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot with direct access to the coast. North of Hai Van Pass, Route 9 leads from Dong Ha into and across Laos to Savannakhet, which is on the Mekong River at the Thai Border. (See Map 3-9.)



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Map 3-8. Rail System of South Vietnam



SOURCE: Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, RVNAF and US Operational Cooperation and Coordination

Map 3-9. Major Highways of South Vietnam

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Like the railroad, South Vietnam's highways and bridges were the targets for Viet Minh sappers during the First Indochina War with the French. By 1954 most of the routes were impassable. Bridges were destroyed. The few remaining roads were not suitable for military use, particularly by the heavy military equipment provided by the US and, later, the massive amounts of heavy equipment organic to US forces that deployed to South Vietnam.

In 1967, the Central Highways and Waterways Coordination Committee (CENCOM) was formed with Vietnamese and US membership. The committee's purpose was to develop a national restoration program in support of military campaign plans, the pacification program, and economic development.<sup>15/</sup>

Problems associated with road construction or restoration in South Vietnam included the following:<sup>16/</sup>

- Insufficient military engineer construction units.
- Faulty design or poor surfacing of existing roads.
- Impact of the wet season on new construction and on existing unimproved roads.
- Very poor weight-bearing quality of soil in the Delta and other areas, thus requiring crushed rock and use of stabilization techniques which were vital for project completion but in extremely short supply.
- Limited availability of rock quarries and the capability to crush and distribute rock and gravel.
- Vegetation and other concealment near construction sites which could harbor snipers, ambush parties, or sappers.
- Vulnerability to attack of the many bridges and culverts.
- Enemy attacks and sabotage that systematically cut lines of communication in key areas.

The vast proliferation of roads and road networks built by US Army Engineers and civilian contractors in South Vietnam from 1966 through 1970 provided a basis for military deployments in most key areas. Many of the roads were hard surfaced with an all-weather capability. Surfacing had

two beneficial effects: problems of dust, mud, and trafficability were reduced, and enemy mining efforts were either hindered or more easily detected. The helicopter bled troops and supplies to enter remote areas and permitted construction of fire bases or other military installations in areas not accessible by road.

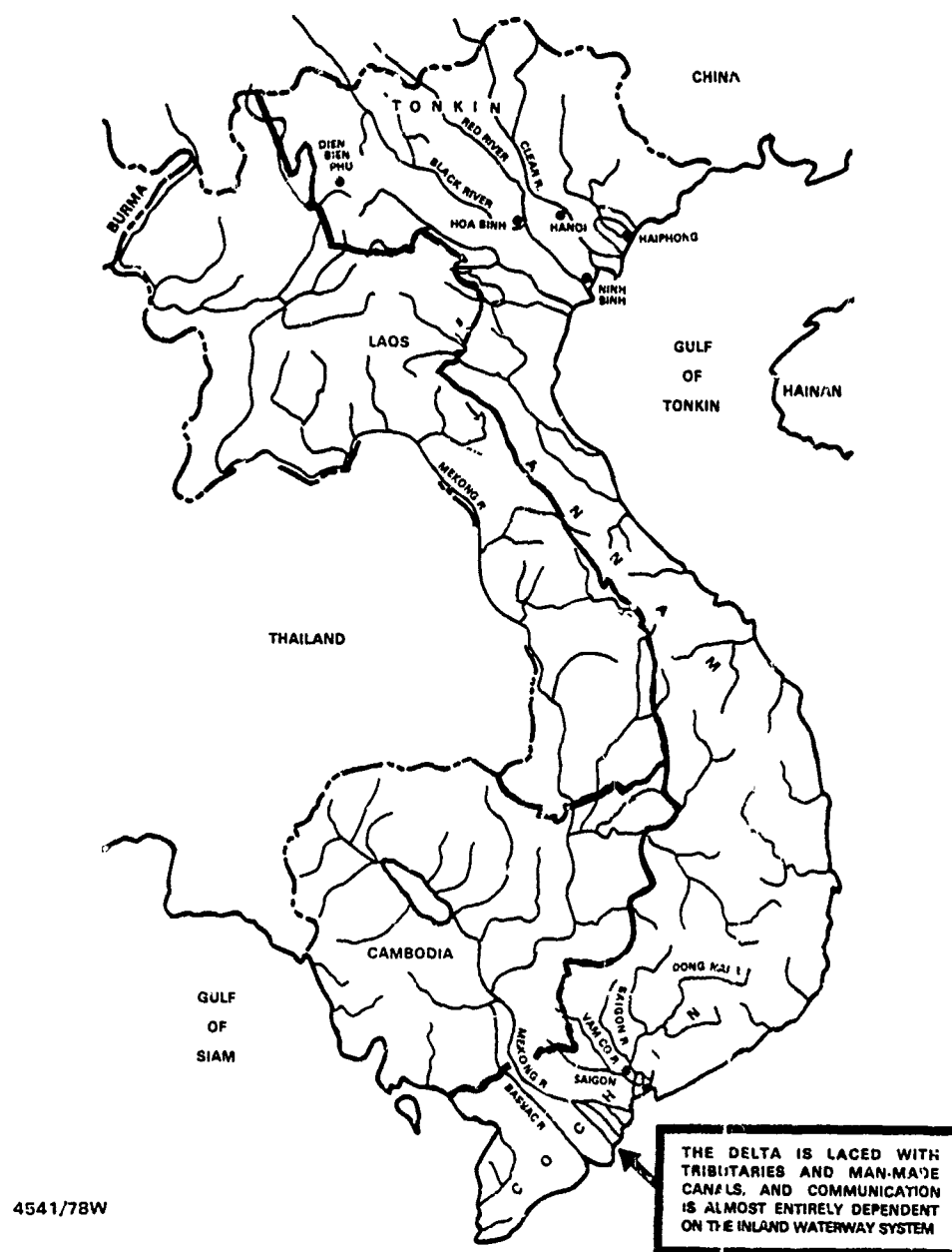
The post-war legacy to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam includes a well-developed transportation system and a substantial amount of construction equipment which was captured in the seizure of South Vietnam in April 1975.

North Vietnam's interest and intent to rehabilitate the rail and road system throughout Vietnam is implicit in the Five-Year Reconstruction Program developed in 1973 by the US/DRV Joint Economic Commission. That document set forth a program of reconstruction aid for "healing the wounds of war", a familiar North Vietnamese refrain.<sup>17/</sup> Presumably that list reflected the \$3.5 billion dollars in aid that President Nixon alluded to in his February 1, 1973 memorandum to Premier Pham Van Dong. Among the extensive number of items listed, substantial quantities were clearly for use in agriculture or road and rail reconstruction.

#### 4. Inland Waterways

Extensive use of inland waterways in Vietnam is generally confined to the Red River and Mekong Deltas. Outside the delta area waterways are relatively unimportant: only three have any appreciable traffic, and they serve Dong Ha, Hue, and Da Nang. In most other areas the streams are short with swift-running water and not suitable for regular traffic. Furthermore, overland routes tend to be more readily available.

The Mekong Delta cannot support major road networks because of the nature of its soil and the configuration of terrain. The Delta contains some 3,600 miles of navigable waterways.<sup>18/</sup> (See Map 3-10.) Since about 800 A.D., the farmers of the Delta have continually improved natural waterways and cut new canals linking local markets.<sup>19/</sup> Constant dredging is required to keep open most of the water LOCs because they are affected by sea tides, river-borne silt, and flooding during the wet season. Bridges often restrict river traffic except for certain times a day



SOURCE: MG Fulton, Riverine Operations, Vietnam Studies Series

Map 3-10. Rivers of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Former French Indochina)

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when water levels are suitable. Native sampans, however, are rarely affected by tide, climate, or bridges.

The river-canal system can accomodate well over a million tons of traffic annually, although PLAF (VC) operations materially restricted the flow during hostilities.20/

Helicopters facilitated operations in the Delta where landing zones are numerous, and the flat, open terrain lends itself to observation and close air support. Once debarked from helicopters, however, ground combat forces face great difficulty in cross-country movement. Tree lines, rice paddy embankments, rivers and canals, and, in some areas, mangrove swamps impede foot traffic and deny vehicular traffic. In the dry season, December to April, light vehicular traffic can be accomodated, including towed artillery and tracked vehicles. During the wet season, it is impractical to deploy vehicles or artillery except on the few existing improved roads.21/

The aquatic nature of the Delta makes it well suited to riverine operations. During hostilities much of the surveillance, patrolling and deployment by US and ARVN forces was carried out in river craft. Navigation was uncertain because the complex nature of the waterways made it difficult to predict tidal effects and associated current velocity. Nevertheless, a further inducement for employing riverine tactics and floating bases was the limited availability of solid ground and the needs of the civilian populace for that ground.

### 5. Ports

Prior to 1965, Saigon was the chief port of South Vietnam, and it ranked as one of the great ports in Southeast Asia. Da Nang (Tourane), Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon served as minor commercial ports. The economy of Vietnam had never required an extensive port system. With the introduction of major US combat forces in 1965, in-country logistic needs increased geometrically. Existing port facilities were grossly inadequate to handle the incredible tonnages of supplies arriving from the United States and Okinawa. Urgently needed material and equipment were often held at sea for weeks while ships waited in line to discharge cargo.

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The use of prefabricated DeLong piers, which were towed to Vietnam and emplaced in suitable locations, helped alleviate the problem initially.<sup>22/</sup> By 1973 a series of modern ports had been established by US forces. (See Map 3-11.) Danang is the best port in the Central lowlands, and it hosts a major, modern airfield complex to augment the port facilities. The principal disadvantage is exposure to strong northeast winter monsoon winds.

Cam Ranh Bay is one of the best harbors in Asia with sheltered, deep-water facilities. It served as the major US-used logistic installation in South Vietnam by the late 1960s.

Vung Tau (Cap St. Jacques) was upgraded to accommodate ocean-going vessels to relieve congestion upriver at Saigon.

### 6. Airfields

#### a. General

South Vietnam had only three jet-capable airfields in 1965: Tan Son Nhut at Saigon, Bien Hoa, and Danang. Air Vietnam, the national airline, had only 13 aircraft at that time, and none were jets.

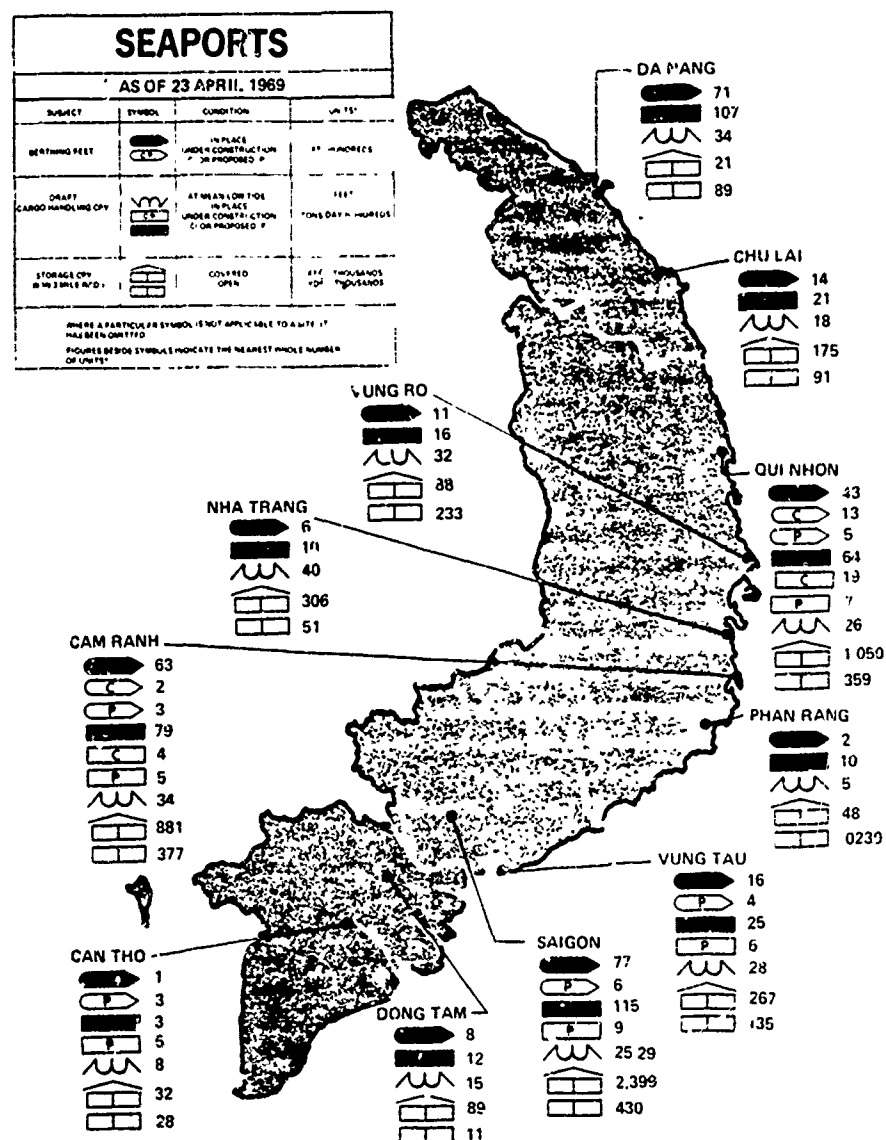
#### b. Tactical Airfields

Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 10 (NMCB-10) landed at Chu Lai on May 10, 1965. The Seabees began construction of a Marine expeditionary Short Airfield for Tactical Support (SATS). The SATS field, comprised of aluminum matting, was equipped with a catapult, arresting gear, and a bulk fuel farm, and was accommodating jet aircraft by 1 June.<sup>23/</sup> Because of poor soil conditions, insufficient laterite, and lack of plastic membrane or effective stabilizing material, the Chu Lai field needed extensive alteration and constant maintenance.

A 10,000-foot airfield was established at Cam Ranh Bay for use by the US Air Force. Aluminum matting was used in its construction, and the contract laborers were able to accomplish extensive soil stabilization before laying the matting on an all-sand subgrade. Work began on August 22, 1965 and the airfield was operational on November 1.<sup>24/</sup>

Three additional jet operational airfields were constructed to support US Air Force operations. The new fields. Phan Rang, Tuy Hoa, and





SOURCE: From LGEN Carroll H. Dunn, Base Development in South Vietnam, 1965-1970, Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies, 1970

4541/78W

Map 3-11. Ports of South Vietnam

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Phu Cat, were located in the II CTZ. More than two dozen tactical airstrips were maintained throughout South Vietnam for combat support and special operations. (See Map 3-12.)

### c. Heliports

The ubiquitous helicopter required heliports or landing zones wherever ground forces operated. During the dry season, dust abrasion and ingestion caused serious maintenance problems. Aluminum matting offered some relief and spraying landing sites with diesel fuel or other dust palliatives temporarily reduced the problem. During the wet season, standing water, erosion and poor trafficability created operating and maintenance problems. Construction of hardstand was found to be better and cheaper in the long term than spraying or use of planking or matting.

Helicopter operations could readily be conducted in the Delta and throughout the coastal lowlands. Using the occasional clearings or lowering troops by jungle penetrator, small-scale helicopter operations were feasible in the forested highlands. A joint Army-Air Force experiment resulted in the use of the "combat trap," an M-121 10,000-pound bomb which could be dropped by parachute from a fixed-wing aircraft or a helicopter and detonated at a height calculated to clear away the dense foliage without leaving a crater.<sup>25/</sup>

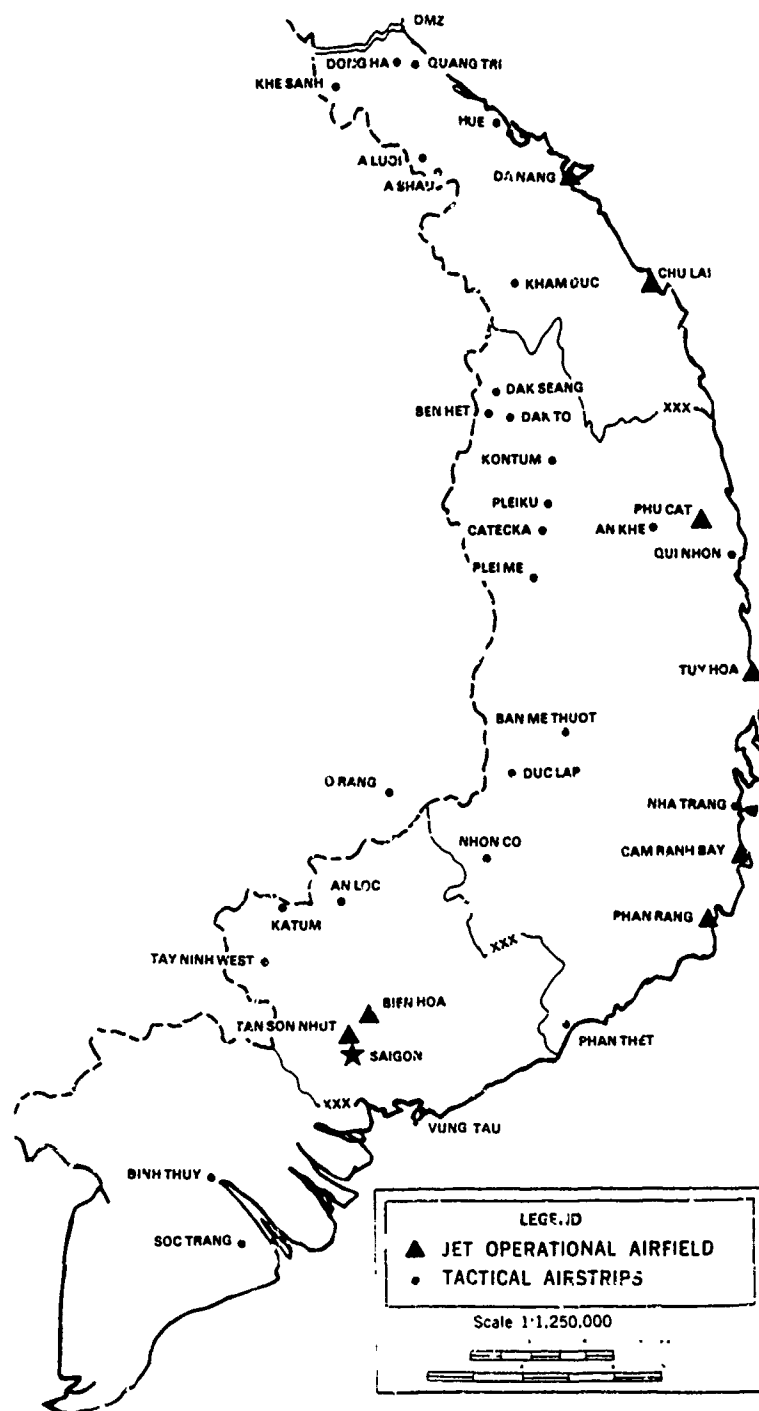
## E. ANALYSIS OF IMPLICATIONS

### 1. Population Patterns

#### a. General Considerations

Ethnic peculiarities and demography are treated in some detail in Chapter 1. Of significance to this chapter are the population clusters in South Vietnam and the military operations that may have been conducted or avoided mainly because of population factors. The following considerations should be noted:

- (1) In 1954 about 900,000 persons were displaced from North Vietnam to the South, thus reducing greatly the dissident population in the North and exacerbating the problem of ethnic and religious



SOURCE: Extracted from The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, Carl Berger, ed.

4541/78W

Map 3-12. Tactical Airfields of South Vietnam

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minorities in the South, but also providing more population for RVN.

- (L) About eight million people, nearly half of South Vietnam's population, live in the Mekong Delta, by far the most important region economically in all of Vietnam. About 25% of the Delta's inhabitants were actively sympathetic to the communists.
  - (a) By 1966 the NLF political-military structure in the Delta included more than 80,000 combat and support troops and local guerrillas, more than double the ARVN strength there.26/
  - (b) Except for those living in RVNAF or US enclaves, many of the Delta's population were subject to the rules of engagement applied to "Free Fire Zones", a circumstance probably leading to alienation from the US and GVN.
- (3) The coastal plain supports about five million people and includes several of South Vietnam's key population centers, most of which proved to be prime objectives of the communists cyclical waves of attacks.
- (4) Urban interior population centers include the cities of the Central Highlands, notably Dak To, Kontum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, and Dalat. These cities and associated lines of communication were objectives in themselves; in addition, their strategic locations controlled east-west access between Laos and the South China Sea.
- (5) South Vietnam hosts several ethnic minorities, including 500,000 Cambodians and a million Chinese (who were a major economic strength), but the 600,000 to one million Montagnards were the most strategically important group, because:
  - (a) Their strategic land holdings span the Annamite Chain and serve as barriers to invading forces emerging from Laos or Cambodia.
  - (b) Montagnards traditionally despise Vietnamese of any stripe: the mountain people want autonomy and are not an easy mark for recruiting by any Vietnamese faction.

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- (c) There was real danger in 1961 that the Viet Cong might dominate the Highlands of the Montagnards as well as the Delta.
  - (d) The US Central Intelligence Agency initiated a program in 1961 to establish Montagnard Civilian Irregular Defense Group camps (CIDG), or strongpoints, along Vietnam's rugged borders with Laos and Cambodia; these camps included the mercenary Montagnard soldiers and their families and farm animals. US Special Forces participated in and eventually assumed responsibility for the CIDG program.
  - (e) CIDG camps were essentially fixed bases from which the Montagnards could conduct reconnaissance and surveillance operations directed at avenues of approach into South Vietnam; the camps became targets for communist attack after 1965 when the CIDG forces assumed a new offensive role.
- (6) South Vietnam's population was spread among 44 provinces and 250 districts, some 2000 villages, and over 10,000 hamlets, for which the GVN was expected to provide security.
- (a) In 1964, it was estimated that only 40% of South Vietnam's population was under government control, and even this figure may have been exaggerated to a substantial degree.
  - (b) The pattern of enemy activity showed clearly that their objectives were political in nature, such as control of the people.
  - (c) Until 1968 the communists retained the initiative with respect to when and where specific population clusters would be targeted for proselyting, recruitment, taxation, or terrorism.
- (7) Refugees posed two distinctly different problems in South Vietnam:
- (a) Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese were rendered homeless by acts of war.
  - (b) Thousands more were involuntarily displaced from their farms; some were resettled in government-controlled camps/hamlets/communities while others became homeless refugees.

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- (c) Cities, particularly Saigon, became overcrowded ghettos imposing incredible burdens on the government while constituting a fertile ground for criminal or communist recruitment.
- (d) In combat areas, masses of refugees fleeing battle often blocked roads and inhibited maneuver or fire by friendly forces.

- b. Analysis of The 1954 Resettlement

Resettlement of nearly a million North Vietnamese, primarily Catholics, to South Vietnam in 1954 appeared to be a psychological victory for democracy. The immediate effect of that resettlement, however, was elimination by the communists of a powerful minority group with important ties to the Catholic world. In the South, the effect was an increase in the refugee population and a deeper alienation of the groups upon whom the Northerners intruded. A parallel may be seen in the exodus from Cuba of dissident Cubans and the impact on Miami and other cities of Florida.

- c. Communist Population Bases in South Vietnam

Combat operations in Vietnam were influenced significantly by the size, location, and nature of population clusters. Control of South Vietnam depended ultimately on control of the people. The communists recognized this fact and their military operations supported their political objectives. Long-time Viet Minh strongholds in the South provided convenient, secure bases for operations, and these strongholds were generally denied to the GVN. Because the GVN had to attempt to provide security to urban areas and LOC, their forces were spread thin and tied down to specific defensive chores. The communists had the initiative and could strike when and where they chose before 1968 and after 1972.

- d. Communist Pressure on Population Centers

The pattern of communist attacks throughout hostilities in South Vietnam reflects their objectives. Harassment enabled them to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of GVN authority. Selective terrorism was often used to compel support. Medical aid and civic action projects were also undertaken by the communists when it enabled them to "win the hearts and

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minds" of Southerners. Control of lines of communication contributed to domination of population centers with associated benefits of tax levies and comparative freedom of movement. In the Tet offensive of 1968 and the Easter offensive of 1972, the communists seized control of several key population centers with the object of holding them if possible.

### e. The Impact of Search and Destroy Missions

Until the final collapse, GVN defense of major population centers was reasonably good. In contested areas and free fire zones, however, US and GVN military activities were counterproductive. Repetitive search and destroy missions alienated the residents of the harassed areas more against the US and GVN than against the VC or PAVN, because the latter appeared to stand for nationalism whereas the former destroyed huts and injured or killed many inhabitants. A policy of one-time search, occupation, VC-elimination, security, and supportive governmental programs might have succeeded in permanently winning over villagers, but the practice of frequent combat intrusion into populated areas had the same effect as Hitler's regions in Russia; a potentially friendly people became bitter enemies.

### f. Refugees

The impact of refugees is dramatically evident in the final collapse of South Vietnam. As principal cities came under increasingly heavy PAVN attack throughout the northern provinces and Central Highlands, masses of civilians fled the scenes of battle. As a result, all major road networks were clogged and tactical movement and redeployment of ground combat forces became virtually impossible. ARVN units were unable to maneuver effectively and critical time was lost in attempting to change the military posture to meet the sudden threat. It is important to note that the North Vietnamese were not constrained by refugee considerations. Taking a page from Soviet doctrine, they capitalized on the confusion created by refugee masses and the constraints imposed on GVN troops. If any insights can be derived from problems associated with population in Vietnam, they are:

- (1) In an insurgency environment, people are the objective, not terrain or other conventional military objectives; the PLAF attempted

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to establish control over the populace by whatever means were necessary - from civil action to terrorism.

- (2) In regular force operations, the communists were insensitive to the civilian populace whereas the US and GVN were expected to minimize the danger to them, although the expectation was not always realized.
- (3) Unduly, unnecessarily, or repetitively hazarding a population to the dangers of battle, or search and destroy operations, is likely to put them in the enemy's camp.
- (4) Forced resettlement of civilian populations should be undertaken in combat zones to protect them from harm insofar as possible and to prevent their interference with essential military operations.

### 2. Geography

The political geography of Southeast Asia had profound implications for American planners. Post mortems on the Vietnam War can hardly fail to point out the fragmented and incredibly inefficient command and control system that was employed to manage the war. Everyone had a piece of the action, yet no one was in complete control. It is critically important that future planners recognize the implications of geography and political geography. Contingency planning must take into account the realities of geography, political institutions, and the relevance of the Department of Defense Unified Command Plan coupled with the President's Country Team mechanism.

The existence and nature of any possible geographic sanctuaries whether supporting political or military adversaries, must be evaluated fully prior to hostilities. Appropriate measures should be identified to destroy or neutralize the effectiveness of any such sanctuaries. If suitable measures for dealing with sanctuaries cannot be identified readily, the entire premise of US involvement should be restudied and the military, political, and psychological risks carefully assessed.

Withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam left that nation in a critical geo-strategic position. Regular PAVN divisions were located



within South Vietnam when the January 1973 cease-fire took effect. Additional divisions were safely ensconced in the sanctuaries of Laos and Cambodia, posing a clear and direct threat to RVNAF. It is true that the South Vietnamese forces enjoyed interior lines of communications, but that single advantage was more than offset by the need to defend all population centers, road and rail networks, and rice-producing areas throughout the long, narrow country. When the final attacks began in 1975, the over-extended RVNAF had to contend with modern, well-equipped PAVN forces concentrating on the key population centers. The advantages of geography were entirely with the enemy. The GVN was confined to operations within South Vietnam: the DRV viewed South Vietnam as the Front and the rest of Indochina as the Rear, comprising a single theater of operations.

3. Topography

a. Attempts to Alter the Topography

American forces in South Vietnam could not change the geography of Southeast Asia. They did, however, change the topography to a remarkable extent. Some plowing cleared vegetation from the sides of main supply routes to reduce the risk of ambush. Defoliation programs denuded vast areas of jungle. Conservationists, liberals, and all sectors of the antiwar coalition were quick to criticize the defoliation operations. Subsequent technical evaluation (see Volume VI) questions the efficacy of combat defoliation. Efforts to influence the weather by seeding clouds came under painful inquiry, also, and there is little to show in favor of such experiments.

b. General Observations

The jungles, mountains, and paddies of South Vietnam imposed almost inflexible limits on combat operations and tactical units. Similarly, the transportation infrastructure made some things possible and barred other military adventures. An assessment of topography and LOCs leads to these observations:

- (1) Rain forests and jungles made large-scale helicopter operations/maneuvers by major combat forces very difficult.

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- (2) The rugged mountain areas of South Vietnam and neighboring Laos and Cambodia provided ideal guerrilla sanctuaries that were remote, inaccessible, easily defended, and difficult to locate.
- (3) Arable lands in the plateaus, coastal lowlands, and Delta were the most heavily populated and were the most suitable for helicopter operations and for employment of air and artillery fire support, but combat operations in those areas threatened the civilian population that the US and GVN were either trying to protect or to win over.
- (4) The limited road networks in the Delta and almost total reliance on river and canal transportation made it necessary to prepare and conduct riverine operations.

### c. Impact on Unit Deployment

Topography influenced the assignment of tactical areas of responsibility to major forces. US Army helicopter units were committed to the northern and central military regions of Vietnam in 1961. Marine Corps Medium Helicopter Squadron HMM-362 was deployed to Vietnam in April 1962 to augment the army effort and provide support for Vietnamese forces in the Delta.

Later, the Marine unit was moved to Danang in the northern Military Region because the Marines' H-34 helicopters were lighter than the Army's H-21s, and thus performed better in the mountainous areas. Subsequently the Army received UH-1 helicopters which performed well anywhere in Vietnam. The initial compromise in putting Marine units in the northern sector later influenced the tactical positioning of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade when it was landed near Danang in 1965 and ultimately absorbed by the corps-sized III Marine Amphibious Force which followed. An anomalous situation resulted in December 1966 when a brigade of the US Army's 9th Division was committed in the Delta. Army units developed the tactics, techniques, and doctrine for riverine operations in conjunction with the Navy, a relationship normally reserved for the Navy and Marine Corps. 27/

d. Transportation Infrastructure

The transportation infrastructure in South Vietnam was adequate for supporting counterinsurgency operations by a lesser developed country but proved inadequate for modern military forces. With the introduction of US forces, massive programs of road, rail and airfield construction had to be undertaken. American commanders relied heavily on helicopter support, often planning military operations based on the proximity of tactical airfields or helipads to the objective area. A major requirement existed for laterite and gravel for road beds and airfields, and subsequently for asphalt or macadam to surface roads and hardstands as protection against dry-season dust and rainy-season quagmires, as well as a deterrent to enemy land-mining activities.

Sea ports in South Vietnam were incapable of receiving and processing even a fraction of the tonnage needed to support the civilian economy and military operations during the initial period of American involvement. Cargo ships lay off the coast of Vietnam for extensive periods of time waiting the opportunity to berth and unload. The subject of logistics is dealt with in Volume VI, but it should be noted that:

- (1) The American commercial and military effort to upgrade existing ports and to build new ones was nothing short of remarkable.
- (2) The early logistic problems reflect directly and adversely on the contingency and logistic planning conducted (or neglected) during the 1954-1964 period.

4. Climate and Weather

a. General

The climate of Indochina is tropical with even temperatures and high humidity. The coastal lowlands from south of Hanoi to about Cap St. Jacques (Vung Tau) near Saigon is subjected to the Northeast or winter monsoon, the effects of which are felt well into the Central Highlands. Virtually all other areas of Indochina are comparatively dry at that time, since they are influenced by the Southwest or summer monsoon.

b. Air Operations

Volume VI deals with the conduct of air operations during hostilities, so it is necessary here only to note that the weather in target areas often differed significantly from the weather at departure airfields. Climatic differences might not have been an important consideration, if on-the-scene commanders had full authority to select specific targets for attack. That authority was often withheld from field commanders and exercised in Washington by National Command Authorities. To compound the problem further, alternate targets were not always assigned by higher authority and the record is replete with cases of bomb loads being dropped uselessly at sea or on empty landscape when primary targets were completely obscured by local weather conditions.

Local weather conditions often imposed severe constraints on combat operations. Aerial observation and close support by fixed-wing aircraft were generally not possible during torrential monsoon rains or the "crachin" conditions that persisted in the coastal lowlands and piedmont during the northeast monsoon (winter). Helicopter support proved to be the most reliable and versatile during monsoons, because these aircraft could operate in marginal weather and generally were able to schedule operations around local rain squalls. A unique phenomenon resulted when US jet aircraft flew at low altitudes underneath a solid blanket of clouds. All jet aircraft of the Vietnam war vintage emitted a thin trail of black smoke, the opposite of a white vapor trail at higher altitudes. Enemy gunners were able to track the jet aircraft with good effect. Significantly, the surface-to-air missile SA-7 (Strella or Grail) was not introduced into the PAVN until US withdrawal was well underway, so the potential impact of weather combined with the SA-7 was never measured.

c. Ground Tactics and Logistics

The DRV knew and understood the influence of the two monsoons. Supplies moved down the Ho Chi Minh Trail mainly during the winter monsoon when the Laotian trails were dry and easily trafficable. Later the trail became an all-weather highway network. Major enemy attacks in Vietnam were often timed to take advantage of inclement weather from either monsoon season in order to minimize the effect of American fire support.

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Similar options were available to US forces. Proposals were advanced for the redeployment of combat assets from regions affected by monsoon conditions to other areas of South Vietnam not suffering the effects of the monsoon. The principle of economy of force would apply to the wet area while the principle of mass could be applied to the dry area. Helicopter mobility made this concept feasible, but no concerted effort was made to implement it.

### F. SUMMARY ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

#### 1. Influence of Population Centers

The nature and consequences of tactical operations in Southeast Asia are analyzed in Volume VI of this study. Many of the lessons learned concerning the population centers are more properly considered in that volume where they can be related to operations in or near urban areas. The brief consideration in this chapter of population centers, however, suggests certain basic insights:

- (1) For the PLAF and the PAVN, people in key areas were priority objectives and they became the sea for the guerrilla fish to swim in.
- (2) A substantial number of villages that had been strongly pro-Viet Minh during French Colonial period remained antigovernment and pro-PLAF/NLF after the 1954 Geneva Agreement, and provided essential support to communist forces.
- (3) The nature of communist activity directed against population clusters was determined largely by the location (border area, hinterland, Central Highlands, coast plain).
- (4) People living in contested areas or free fire zones were subjected repetitively to the hazards of combat, a circumstance that tended to alienate them from the GVN and US.
- (5) Refugees posed a significant housing and food problem in the cities and in many cases clogged the roads during major tactical operations where they interfered with maneuver and fire support, particularly in the 1972-1975 period.

2. Climate and Weather

Communist forces in South Vietnam were able to move in virtually any terrain and weather during the insurgency phase: eventually the Ho Chi Minh Trail was developed into an all-weather transportation network complete with POL pipeline to support major force operations. US and allied forces tended to be roadbound and grounded, and were generally immobile during the intense rainy periods that accompanied whichever monsoon affected their particular region.

It appears that at the Washington level there was no appreciation of the constraints that weather imposed on aerial reconnaissance, surveillance, and bombing. This lesson is based on the fact that much of the target selection for bombing in the North was accomplished in Washington without regard to weather patterns or the need to designate alternate targets. Frequently, weather over the target prevented accomplishment of the mission and just as frequently no alternate targets had been authorized. (See Volume VI, Chapter 6 for details).

The enemy capitalized on local weather conditions in a number of ways:

- (1) By moving supplies and equipment down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos when trafficability was not impaired by rain.
- (2) By establishing supply caches near future objectives during periods of inclement weather when allied observation was minimal.
- (3) By infiltrating troop units near objectives to facilitate attacks when weather conditions made allied air support least effective.

3. Geography

South Vietnam was nearly impossible to defend, given its geostrategic situation. The country forms a 600-mile-long arc from the DMZ to the Delta and averages about 100 miles wide, with some areas only 50 miles from sea to border. The Parrot's Beak is a strategic salient into South Vietnam from Cambodia, pointing directly at Saigon. Neighboring Laos and Cambodia were vital sanctuaries for guerrillas and regular army forces throughout hostilities. Thus geography conveyed to the North Vietnamese two strategic advantages.

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- (1) Sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia enabled the DRV to train, resupply, and refit, and to control casualties and employ protracted warfare, thus guaranteeing defeat of the US strategy of attrition.
- (2) United States observance of the sovereign boundaries and rights of friendly and neutral Southeast Asian nations, at least from the standpoint of politico-military responsibilities in managing warfare within that theater, fragmented US control of its military operations throughout the region; the communists were not constrained by the politico-geographic character of the area, and thus were able to coordinate their operations throughout the entire theater with great effectiveness.

Geography has strategic implications for both sides in a war and must be viewed from both perspectives.

#### 4. Topography and Transportation

The topography of South Vietnam offered interesting challenges to military planners and tacticians. Most of the insights and lessons learned about these features are derived from an analysis of tactical operations and, therefore, are discussed in Volume VI.

American and allied soldiers operated successfully in all areas of South Vietnam, though not without encountering some unique and serious problems:

- (1) A new major transportation infrastructure had to be built in South Vietnam to accommodate the modern equipment used by US forces; a massive effort requiring more than two years which delayed the optimal application of US combat power.
- (2) Although commercial engineering firms were used extensively for construction projects, a substantial number of the American troop units in Vietnam were dedicated to construction-type projects.
- (3) Extremely limited rock quarries and suppliers of rock and gravel inhibited road and rail construction programs, and at one point made it necessary to import rock and gravel for that important program.

- (4) The helicopter provided access to remote areas along the border (CIUG) camps and in the hinterland (firebases), but these bases became almost entirely dependent on the helicopter for resupply, reinforcement, and fire support in cases of close-in ground (sapper) attack.

5. The US Soldier In Vietnam

The climate and geography of Southeast Asia are not mysteries, nor are they subject to man-made alteration to any appreciable degree. American troops were surprised by the impact of rain, humidity, heat, and dust on the performance of their machines and the debilitating impact on people.

Although climate presented some tough problems, American ingenuity was able to overcome most of them. US servicemen demonstrated their ability to operate effectively in the mountains and the Delta, in triple canopy and rice paddies, and in the plateaus and cities. Climate was not a deciding factor in the final outcome of the Second Indochina War.

6. A Final Insight

The political geography of Southeast Asia presented a formidable problem, and in the end it was a deciding factor in the outcome of the war. Contrary to a 1962 JCS position that, "Any war in the Southeast Asian Mainland will be a peninsula and island-type of campaign..." 28/ political geography dictated otherwise. As long as the US treated the region on the basis of political boundaries, and accepted the constraints imposed, while the DRV treated the entire region as a single theater of operations, the initiative lay with the DRV.

G. LESSON

The peculiarities of climate, topography and political geography, their constraints on military operations, and the possibilities for exploiting those peculiarities politically or militarily in any given region may be viewed in an entirely different way by the protagonists in an armed



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struggle. It is imperative that these potential constraints and advantages be evaluated from the enemy's perspective as well as one's own and the consequences be assessed.

CHAPTER 3 ENDNOTES

1. LTG. John J. Tolson, Air Mobility 1961-1971. Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1973), pp. 186-187.
2. MG. Robert R. Ploger, US Army Engineers 1965-1970. Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1974), p. 60.
3. Central Intelligence Agency, Indochina Atlas, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence, October 1970.
4. MG. Joseph A. McChristian, The Role of Military Intelligence 1965-1967. Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1974), p. 156.
5. LTG. Carroll H. Dunn, Base Development in Vietnam. Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972), pp. 11-12.
6. Because of climate, recovery of the remains of personnel killed in Southeast Asia can be particularly difficult unless accomplished immediately. Jungle growth, shifting sands, or mud quickly hide any evidence. Skeletal remains are subjected to alternating wet and dry seasons, which have a leaching effect causing flaking and erosion of bone structure. Identification of remains becomes increasingly difficult with the passage of time. For more detailed treatment of this subject see U.S. Congress, House. Final Report of the Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia. H. Rept. No. 944-1754, 94th Congress, 2d session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 13, 1976), pp. 204-205. Hereafter, Select Committee MIA Report.
7. Several of the Department of the Army Vietnam Studies contain simple but useful maps showing various features of South Vietnam, for example:  
  
MG Robert R. Ploger, US Army Engineers 1965-1970, p. 2, and LTG Carroll H. Dunn, Base Development in South Vietnam 1965-1970, p. 4. Also see Ngo Quang Truong, LTG, ARVN, Territorial Forces, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History (McLean, Va.: General Research Corporation, 1978), pp. 12, 14, 18.
8. Until 1957, South Vietnam retained the military territorial (region) organization that existed under the French: MR-1 comprising Cochinchina, MR-2 in the northern portion of RVN, and MR-4 in the Central Highlands. Three corps headquarters were created in 1958, a fourth corps headquarters was added in 1961, at which time the three military region headquarters were deactivated. Corps commanders were CTZ commanders. In 1970 the corps areas were called military regions instead of CTZ, but the former boundaries still existed. Truong, Territorial

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- Forces, pp. 15-23. For principal headquarters locations (in 1966), brigade and division-level, see Ngo Quang Truong, RVNAF and US Operational Cooperation and Coordination, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for the Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History (McLean, Va.: General Research Corporation, 1976), p. 48.
9. MG. George S. Eckhardt, Command and Control 1950-1969. Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1974), p. 57. Two brigades of the US 9th Division commenced operations in the IV CTZ in 1967 as the Riverine Assault Group.
  10. The sponsor's RFP did not call for a similar chapter on climate, geography, and transportation in Volume 1, The Enemy, of this study, so a thumbnail sketch of North Vietnam is included here.
  11. Map 3-6 was prepared by BDM analysts based mainly on National Intelligence Survey, South Vietnam NIS43D GS (Rev) October 1969. Declassified in part at the request of BDM. Hereafter cited as NIS.
  12. Frank Snapp, Decent Interval (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 19-20. Also see William Colby, Honorable Men (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 299. In a discussion with the BDM study team Ambassador Colby stated that documents made available to the CIA after Lon Nol deposed Prince Sihanouk in 1970 revealed the major extent to which Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) had been used to supply communist units in the southern half of RVN.
  13. Ploger, US Army Engineers, p. 25.
  14. Dunn, Base Development, p. 71.
  15. Ibid., p. 12.
  16. Dunn, Base Development, p. 102-102 and Ploger, US Army Engineers, pp. 123-129. Also, interview with LTC Michel Costino, US Army (Ret), a former Corps of Engineers officer who served two tours of duty in Vietnam.
  17. Select Committee on MIA Report, App. I, pp. 249-253.
  18. NIS, pp. 19-20.
  19. MG William B. Fulton, Riverine Operations 1966-1969, Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 19.
  20. NIS, p. 20.

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21. General Donn A. Starry, Mounted Combat in Vietnam, Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 11-13 provides terrain analysis data in the form of "go or no go" maps showing that tanks could move with organic support in 51% of the country in the dry season and in 46% during the wet season. Armored personnel carriers could move in 65% of Vietnam the year-round. In the Mekong delta, however, tanks could not "go" during the wet season; their 46% capability was all in the three northern military regions.
22. Dunn, Base Development, pp. 54-55.
23. LTG. Keith B. McCutcheon, USMC "Marine Aviation in Vietnam 1962-1970," The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973. An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography. Headquarters, US Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, 1974, pp. 128-129. Reprinted from Naval Review 1971 with permission of the US Naval Institute.
24. Dunn, Base Development, p. 61.
25. LTG John H. Hay, Jr., Tactical and Materiel Innovations. Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 39.
26. Fulton, Riverine Operations, pp. 21-25, lists the estimated strength of the VC in IV CTZ as 82,545, comprised of 19,270 combat troops; 1,290 support troops; 50,765 local part-time guerrillas; and 11,220 political cadre. ARVN strength in the Delta in 1966 averaged 40,000 in the divisions, five Ranger battalions, and three armored country squadrons.
27. Gen. William Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports (New York: Doubleday, 1976), on pp. 185, 186, he notes:

The gamble I took in 1965 to meet the crisis threatening the ARVN by bringing in American combat troops before I had developed a logistical system to support them paid off, both because the American soldier adapts readily to exigencies and because engineer and logistical troops accomplished near miracles. Even though there were few support troops at first, the engineers and logisticians in less than two and a half years superimposed a modern logistical system on an underdeveloped nation capable of supporting one and a quarter million troops of various nationalities, while at the same time providing large amounts of supplies for the local population. Surely that was one of the more remarkable accomplishments of American forces in Vietnam.

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28. Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum (JCSM) of 13 January 1962 to the Secretary of Defense. Reprinted in The New York Times, The Pentagon Papers (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 54.

Note: Several atlases were consulted to verify data used in this chapter. Among the most useful were these:

Atlas of South-East Asia with an introduction by D.G.E. Hall, Professor Emeritus in the University of London (Amsterdam: D Jambatan N.V., 1964).

Indochina Atlas. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence, October 1970. (Unclassified).

CHAPTER 4  
THE ECONOMY

The total economic picture of the RVN was unsatisfactory from the day it was born until it collapsed. Endowed with limited economic and financial resources and only embryonic industrial capabilities, the RVN was not capable of subsisting, much less defending itself. The RVNAF depended almost entirely on U.S. military aid during all these years for their organization, equipment, training and combat capabilities. The contribution of the GVN defense budget was rather modest as compared to what was provided by the U.S. and could only cover personnel salaries and a few operating costs. Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen, ARVN, 1976.1/

....the economic crisis of South Vietnam during 1974 was so severe that it seemed Hanoi might be content with applying just enough military pressure to force the GVN to maintain its costly military forces and await the internal collapse of the Thieu regime. Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam.2/

A. INTRODUCTION

A united Vietnam provided the essential basis for a viable, if rather primitive, economic unit. But the division of Vietnam resulted in two unbalanced and deficient economies: the North was short of food while the South lacked minerals, power and industry. Both halves required substantial outside support merely to provide the basic necessities, let alone to fight a protracted war. The quotations selected for this introduction illustrate the intractable economic dilemma facing the RVN in its final years. The drastic reduction in US aid after the 1973 ceasefire, exacerbated by a "galloping" inflation, not only would have severely crippled the RVN's economy during peace, but helped ensure its wartime collapse.

This chapter examines and assesses the RVN economy from the following viewpoints:

- The basic economy, but only in enough detail to provide the data essential for the analysis of key issues.

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- The effect on the economy of the Second Indochina War and the substantial US presence in and aid to the RVN.
- The significant, and almost totally negative, effects that the economy had on the prosecution of the war.

Since the primary focus of the study is on the US military perspective, this chapter does not purport to be an in-depth review and analysis of the economic problems and programs of the RVN. Rather, its concentration is on how the economy affected the war effort and vice versa. Because of its paramount influence on that economy, the US role is highlighted.

Section B contains a "snapshot" of the economic status in the Southern "Zone" after the 1954 ceasefire and partition. Sections C through F analyze the reasons for the fluctuations in the economy during four distinct periods spanning the life cycle of the RVN. The final two sections contain significant insights and lessons drawn from the analyses.

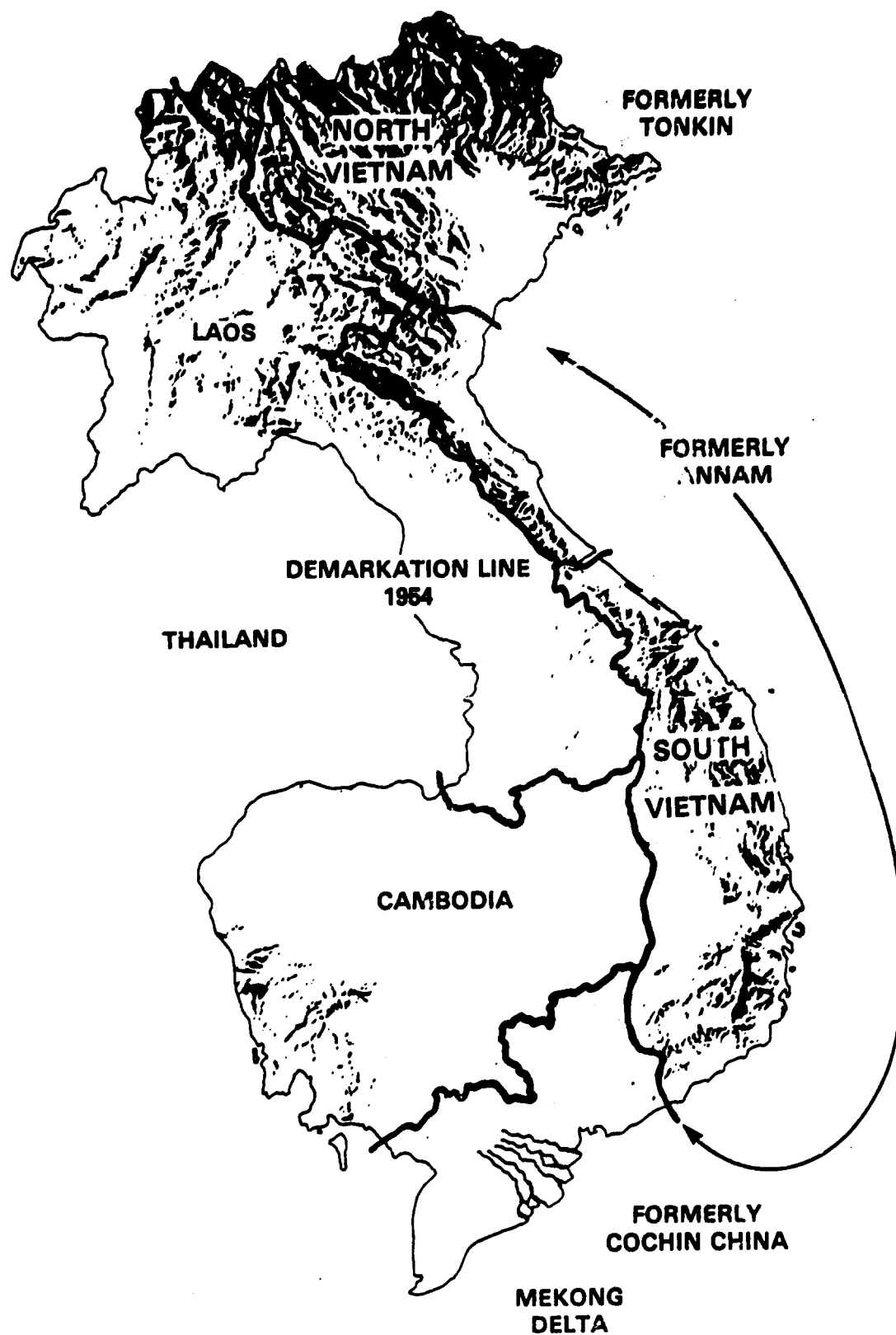
### B. PROFILE "SNAPSHOT" OF THE ECONOMY IN 1954

The Geneva Accords divided Vietnam into two "temporary zones". (See Map 4-1.) Neither zone was economically self-sufficient. The Mekong Delta was the "breadbasket" for all of Vietnam. About 80% of the people in the Southern zone were peasants, mainly tenant farmers, who were concentrated in the Delta and along the narrow coastal plains of Annam. The primary exports were rice and raw rubber; most raw materials and manufactured goods had to be imported.

#### 1. The French Legacy

The French gained complete control of Cochin China during the 1860s, but did not absorb Tonkin and Annam until 20 years later. Their presence and influence in the colony of Cochin China were much more pervasive than they were in the other two regions.

During the period of French rule a number of peasants migrated to the cities to become merchants or low to mid-level civil servants, while others joined the French Colonial Army. These classes were more influenced



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SOURCE: CIA, Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence, 1970  
Map 4-1. The "Temporary" Zones of Vietnam



by French culture than were the peasants, but much less so than were the educated elite; a substantial portion of the latter group was more loyal to France than to fellow Vietnamese. But if the economic lot of these people improved under colonial rule, the reverse was true for those who stayed in the countryside.

"The peasantry, once almost self-sufficient, had come to depend on the landowners, the Chinese merchants, the French administrators, and the fluctuations of the international rice market."3/

In order to enhance the internal and external flow of goods, the French built simple but functional roads, bridges, ports, airports, and a railroad which connected Saigon and Hanoi. They also constructed, with Vietnamese labor, hundreds of canals which served the dual needs of drainage and transportation in the Delta regions. They cleared and cultivated "virgin lands" for rice fields and plantations and established local market villages. These physical improvements were the principal benefits to the South Vietnamese from the French legacy. On the negative side, perhaps the most critical and long term deficiency was in experienced technicians, planners and managers; this gap was never closed.4/

## 2. Impact of the First Indochina War

Although the fighting was less severe in Cochin China than it was in Tonkin or Annam, the damage to the economy, nevertheless, was significant. The Viet Minh attempted to weaken the economy and thus the French control and prestige by isolating the cities and towns. That strategy resulted in considerable destruction to the transportation infrastructure which had already been heavily bombed toward the end of World War II.

During the course of the war, thousands of peasants fled the fighting for the relative safety provided by the cities. This had an adverse effect on the economy: many rice paddies lay fallow and the administration was forced to provide shelter and food for these people. After the ceasefire this burden was multiplied by the sudden influx of about 900,000 refugees from the North.

Because the war consumed most of the money generated in and allocated to French Indochina, local capital investments were practically nil

for eight years following the five-year hiatus created by the Japanese occupation. The long, bitter struggle increased opportunities for smuggling and corruption, and caused a serious inflation which restricted the buying power of the people and Bao Dai's new government.

This weak and inexperienced government was further frustrated in its economic recovery plans by its virtual exclusion from large tracts of the countryside by the various factions and assorted enemies; besides the 10,000 or so Viet Minh who did not regroup to the North, there were the militant sects which had been armed by the French - the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Binh Xuyen, etc. Ironically, the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen had helped protect the production and shipment of rubber, which quadrupled in value between 1949 and 1951; the Korean War sharply increased the demand.5/

Perhaps the only significant financial bonus of the war in the southern half of Vietnam was the abandonment of tens of thousands of tons of scrap metal; during the first two years of the Republic, export of that scrap was second only to rubber in dollar value.6/

### 3. US Plans and Support

The US became seriously concerned about the security of Southeast Asia because of three concurrent wars - the "Cold" war, the Indochinese war, and then the Korean War. Starting with a modest grant of \$10 million in 1950, the US wound up paying for 78% of the French war effort in Indochina before the Geneva Accords brought the conflict to a halt. Over the four-year period, a total of more than two and a half billion dollars in military aid was furnished.7/

A US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) Indochina was formed in 1950 to oversee the assistance program, but its power was limited since all aid, including that for indigenous forces, was funneled through the French. In 1955, MAAG Indochina was broken up to provide components for Cambodia and South Vietnam. The US decided to provide aid directly to the GVN, headed by Premier Ngo Dinh Diem (Head of State Bao Dai was on the French Riviera much more than he was in Saigon).8/ Military aid, however, was still furnished through the French High Command until 1956.9/

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From this rather small beginning, the RVN became increasingly dependent upon US economic and military aid, and could not long survive without massive doses of both.

### C. THE DIEM ERA (1955-1963)

#### 1. Problems and Plans

Bao Dai was soundly defeated in the 1955 nationwide referendum in South Vietnam, and Diem was installed as president of the new republic. He inherited a weak, war-torn and unbalanced economy which was still dominated by the French, Chinese merchants and financiers, and rich Vietnamese landlords.

Although the economic problems facing Diem and his fledgling government were quite severe, of necessity they were accorded a lower priority than were the imperatives of asserting governmental authority over disparate factions, including key leaders of the armed forces. The care and resettlement of the 900,000 regroupees from the North, in addition to the Southern war refugees, was another problem which demanded urgent attention; generous US aid was indispensable and forthcoming.

Despite these and many other vexing obstacles Diem had high hopes and made grandiose plans for the republic, which was established after the 1955 referendum; his rather ambitious dream was to make the RVN economically self sufficient.<sup>10/</sup> However, his first Minister of Economics was also concurrently his Ambassador to the United States - a rather awesome combination of responsibilities.

In order to make the dream of self-sufficiency a reality, several major obstacles had to be overcome: the restoration of the transportation system, the establishment of an indigenous monetary system, the expansion of the production of rice and rubber, and the building of mines and factories to replace the raw materials and goods formerly provided from Tonkin. Yet even if all of these undertakings were completed quickly and effectively, the economy of RVN would still require significant external assistance for some time, to achieve a reasonable degree of self-sufficiency.

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The US was sympathetic to the economic problems facing Diem and was willing to provide advice and monies to assist him in solving them; the US Operations Mission (USOM) was established in 1955 as an adjunct to the embassy to help in both arenas. The economic aid provided by the US in 1955 was over \$322 million - a larger amount than for any of the next nine years.11/

The National Bank of Vietnam (NBVN) was established in 1954 to facilitate the monetary transition from the French franc to the Vietnamese piaster (dong).

It has the exclusive right to issue notes and sell National Treasury bonds and securities for the Government of South Vietnam, to control the use of foreign exchange and gold, and to regulate the formation of new banks. The NBVN also advises the government on economic and financial matters.12/

More than 70% of the US economic aid funds supported the Commercial Import Program (CIP) which provided monies/credit for the importing of commodities and equipment considered essential to the functioning of the economy. The money generated by these transactions went into the "counterpart funds" in the NBVN; jointly the US and GVN decided on the allocation of these funds.13/ Additional revenue was generated by taxes imposed on the imported goods.

In the first years of his regime Diem earned, probably with US assistance, the title of "tough miracle man", since most of his friends and enemies alike believed that the horrendous political and economic problems which he had to resolve were well beyond his capacity. Much worthwhile work was accomplished in a relatively short time, however. Two former RVNAF generals reported that:

National reconstruction and economic development programs received a great deal of attention. With American assistance, North Vietnamese refugees and displaced persons in the South had been resettled or returned to their home villages within two years, 1955 and 1956. Several resettlement areas such as Cai San and Ho Noi, and pioneer farming projects began to

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prosper. Roads and bridges were rebuilt; the railroad link from Saigon to Quang Tri was reopened. The production of rice and other crops, cattle raising, and fishing were rapidly increasing. Rice production rose from 2.6 million metric tons in 1954 to 5 million tons in 1959 and rubber production from 51,000 to 79,000 tons during the same period. In 1960 South Vietnam was exporting 70,000 metric tons of rubber and 340,000 metric tons of rice.

A base was also laid for industrial development. In this connection, the South Vietnamese government had decided to cooperate with the private sector in order to stimulate and control development. Many small firms, therefore, proliferated and larger industries were founded as joint government-private ventures. Two industrial zones, the Saigon-Bien Hoa complex and the Nong Son-An Hoa area in Quang Nam Province, began to grow and expand. Vietnamese industry started producing textiles, sugar, glass, medicines, cement and other consumer goods.<sup>14/</sup>

These accomplishments were all the more remarkable considering the inexperience, inefficiency, and corruption at all levels of the GVN. Dennis Duncanson, an early adviser to and supporter of Diem, but later his critic, summed up the economic progress during those years as follows:

The material achievements of the Ngo Dinh Diem dictatorship were far from negligible; but they were circumscribed by the administrative limitations of the regime itself as well as by insecurity fomented by the Communists outside the towns.<sup>15/</sup>

### 2. The Enemy Reacts

The Lao Dong Party's hope that the Southern half of Vietnam would fall into their hands through the collapse of the GVN or through an election in 1956 was dashed by Diem in both respects. Therefore they decided to reunite the country using methods tested in the First Indochina War. A keystone of their strategy was to surround and strangle the cities. As early as the summer of 1960 Bernard Fall explained to American officers on their way to Vietnam how his analysis of tax records and "incidents" indicated that Saigon was already being encircled systematically.<sup>16/</sup>

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Long An was a critical province to both the GVN and to the insurgents, since it controlled the routes from the Mekong Delta to the capital, which depended almost totally on the rice, hogs, and charcoal from that region. Jeffrey Race in his well-researched book, War Comes to Long An, details how the NLF in 1960 gained de facto political and physical control over that key province. Similar actions took place over many of the productive areas of RVN. The enemy also taxed the people under its full or part time control and even taxed many who were merely passing through those areas. They then bought up large amounts of foodstuffs and other necessities, often at higher prices than paid by GVN. This combination of "blockade" and purchase, in addition to the increased tempo of the fighting, first slowed and then reversed the upward trend in rice production and distribution generated by GVN and US actions.

The Agrovilles and later the Strategic Hamlets eroded the NLF's previous political, military and economic predominance in sections of the countryside was considered by the NLF to be a serious threat which it had to overcome. (See Volume V, for detailed discussion of these programs.)

### 3. Implications for the Economy and the War

In May 1961, in their economic summary for the final six months of 1960, the US Embassy Saigon reported to Washington:

Adverse factors included a falling off in rice shipments to Saigon and for export (owing to Viet Cong interference with movement of paddy from farms to brokers), causing the year's export total to reach only 340,000 tons as compared to at least 400,000 tons which might have been available. Viet Cong depredations likewise caused a notable decline in the whole range of the GVN's agrarian reform and agricultural development activities, and in some road construction in the Kontum area. In November and December Saigon merchants reported increasing difficulty in making merchandise deliveries to provincial towns. Domestic commerce was apparently slowed in the same months by merchants' uncertainties as to political factors following the short-lived military rebellion of November 11-12. 17/

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The successful tactics employed by the enemy resulted in critical shortages and thus inflation; they also increased black market activities and the opportunity for corruption in and out of the government. Morale fell as the RVNAF soldiers and their families suffered as much or more than the bulk of the urban population. Diem lost a good deal of the popularity and support which his earlier successes had generated. Without substantial US aid it is doubtful if the GVN would have survived long. The "miracles" of the late 1950's were both transient and fragile.

When key figures in the USG became embarrassed by and disgusted with Diem's ineffective conduct of the war and his clumsy handling of the Buddhist militants, a decision was made to increase the pressure on him to get rid of the Nhus and to broaden his political base. In September 1963 some US economic aid to RVN was held back. This was one of the "signals" sent to the plotting RVNAF generals that the USG no longer was committed to "Sink or Swim with Diem." This use of economic leverage to attempt to gain political conversions helped to create the climate for the overthrow and murder of Diem and Nhu; the bickering generals soon pulled us directly into the heart of the quagmire.<sup>18/</sup>

### D. REVOLVING GOVERNMENTS (1964-1967)

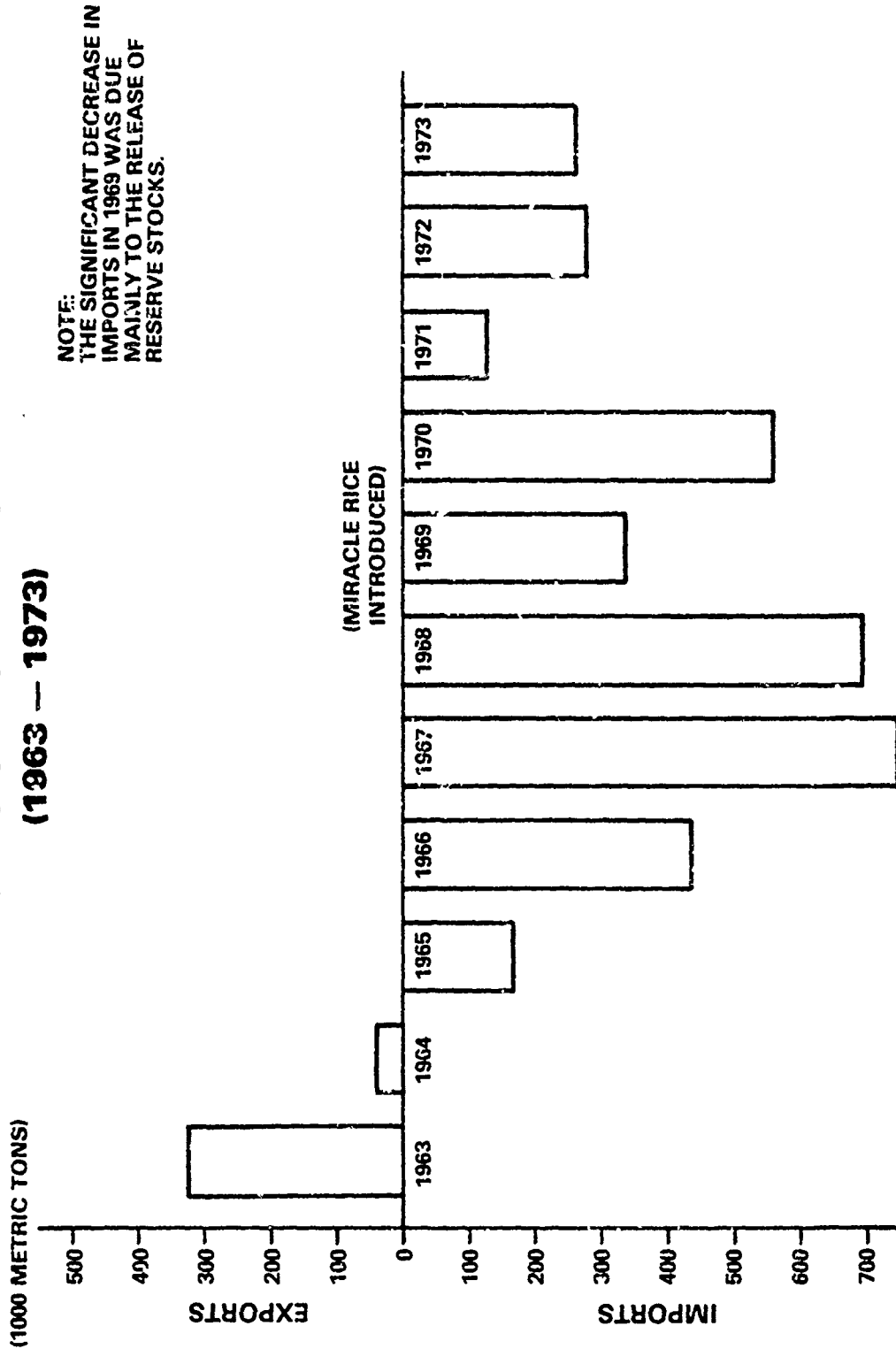
#### 1. Political and Economic Chaos

The 1963 coup ushered in a period of political instability and weakness which quickly spilled over into the military and economic areas. The cumulative adverse impacts of the deteriorating political and military situations on the crucial production and distribution of rice is depicted in Figure 4-1. Together rice and rubber accounted for over 84% of the monies generated by exports from RVN; Figure 4-2 portrays what happened in these two key sectors in the post-Diem era.\* Imports of rice, mostly from the US, prevented starvation and propped up the tottering economy.

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\*The trend line for all exports illustrates a general decline in 1960 as the insurgency expanded, and rice exports quickly plummeted to zero after November 1963.

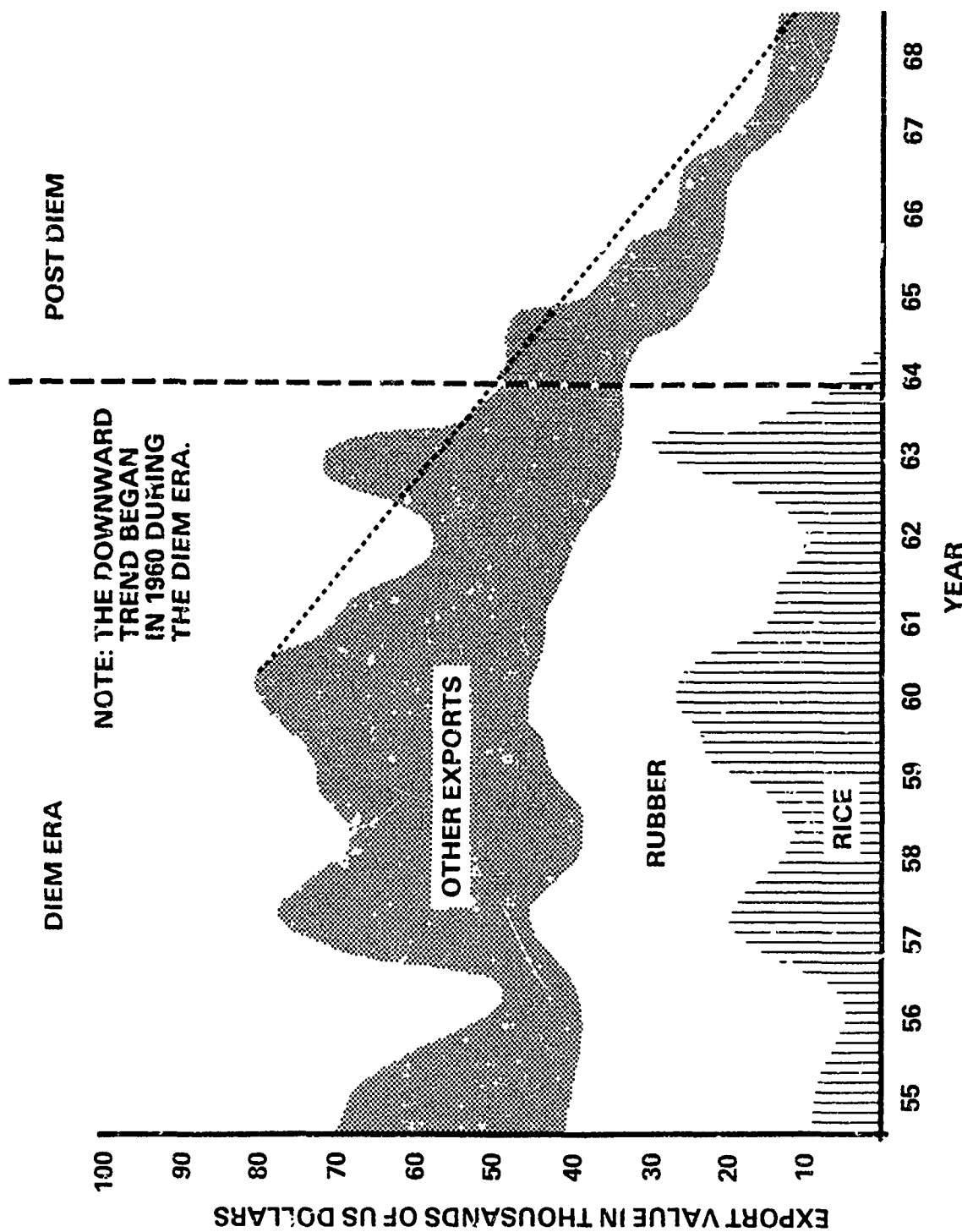
# WAR IMPACT ON RICE PRODUCTION IN SVN (1963 - 1973)



SOURCE: US Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Vietnam: May 1974,  
93rd Congress, 2nd Sess., Aug. 1974

Figure 4-1. War Impact on Rice Production in SVN, 1963-1973





SOURCES: Joint Economic Office, USAID/Vietnam; National Institute of Statistics; Directorate General of Customs

Figure 4-2. Value of Selected Export Commodities

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The overthrow of Diem and Nhu in November 1963 created a false and brief euphoria in sectors of the USG and in elements of the urban population of RVN. The Economic Section of the US Embassy in Saigon, however, noted serious problems:

By the end of November, however, it became clear that the government was having difficulty getting organized. The Viet Cong took advantage of this to attack hamlets and villages. The deteriorating military situation in the countryside created business uncertainty in Saigon. Also contributing were the political and economic deterioration in Cambodia, French diplomatic overtures toward Cambodia and Communist China, and Congressional reductions in the U.S. foreign aid bill which augured possible decreased resistance to [North] Vietnam.19/

As a sign of support for the military junta which replaced Diem and Nhu, the USG quickly restored the economic aid previously withheld.

2. The Impact of the "Big War" and US Presence

Ambassador Taylor and the USG realized that the introduction of large numbers of US troops into RVN would create a series of new political, sociological, and economic problems for RVN as well as for the US. But by mid-1965 it became apparent that both GVN and RVNAF were near the point of moral and physical collapse. Since the US was not prepared to concede defeat in Southeast Asia, the decision was made to employ sufficient US military forces to stem and then to reverse the tide; the rather modest initial deployments were increased, step by step, until a total of over 500,000 US military personnel were in country by the end of 1968.20/

As the war escalated in magnitude and ferocity during this period, enemy tactics and the US "Way of War" severely hampered the production and transportation of rice and rubber, and created hundreds of thousands of refugees throughout the countryside. Only the introduction of "miracle rice" in 1969, chemical fertilizers, etc. enabled the yield of rice to remain relatively constant. But despite significant civilian and military casualties, the population continued to increase quite rapidly and so did the demand for food and other necessities.

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During this period both RVNAF and MACV conducted a series of military operations specifically designed to prevent the enemy from interfering with the harvest and transportation of rice. Although the results varied widely, this concept illustrated a proper use of military force to gain political and economic ends.

By the end of 1968 there was nearly one US or allied soldier for every 30 Vietnamese in RVN. This massive presence of "wealthy" foreigners created an unprecedented demand for goods and services. The imported US "Way of Life" greatly compounded the social and economic ills of RVN: inflation, the blackmarket, official corruption, and the siphoning off of labor from the paddies.

These conditions multiplied the demands of the artificially bloated urban consumer society, which helped fuel the inflation and created an unreal impression of opulence in the midst of a war. The multitude of Hondas, luxury cars, TV sets, air conditioners, etc., in Saigon and other cities was astounding.<sup>21/</sup>

Pacific Architects and Engineers (PA&E) trained some 23,000 Vietnamese in various facilities maintenance skills. "During October 1967 the US Army Engineer Command, Vietnam, employed over 8,500 Vietnamese, many of whom acquired new skills and insights through this experience."<sup>22/</sup> Yet these skilled people were short circuited from the economy and RVNAF.

An economic (and military) plus resulting from the pervasive US presence was the repair and vast expansion of the transportation network in RVN. During fiscal years 1965-1973 the US spent about one billion dollars on road repair and maintenance in RVN.<sup>23/</sup>

The Lines of Communication program in Vietnam was one of the largest single engineer projects ever undertaken by the United States military in a foreign country. When completed this massive construction project would tie together the major population centers of the country with 4106 kilometers (3,038 miles) of modern high-speed highways.<sup>24/</sup>

Additionally, modern ports and airfields were made available to RVN. The complex at Cam Ranh Bay suits the Russian Pacific Fleet quite well.<sup>25/</sup>

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During this period the number one economic enemy in RVN was the crippling rate of inflation which particularly hurt the salaried, such as civil servants, police and the military. An official USG study in 1969 reported:

As a result of the large deficit in the government budget and the heavy demands placed on the local economy by U.S. forces, strong inflationary pressures have persisted in the wartorn Vietnamese economy...During 1965-68 the money supply expanded by 353% and the government's consumer price index of Saigon increased 286%.26/

Figures 4-3 and 4-4 graphically illustrate portions of the economic plight facing GVN and their US advisors: the extremely unfavorable balance of trade and the acute inflation of consumer prices.

### 3. US Counteractions

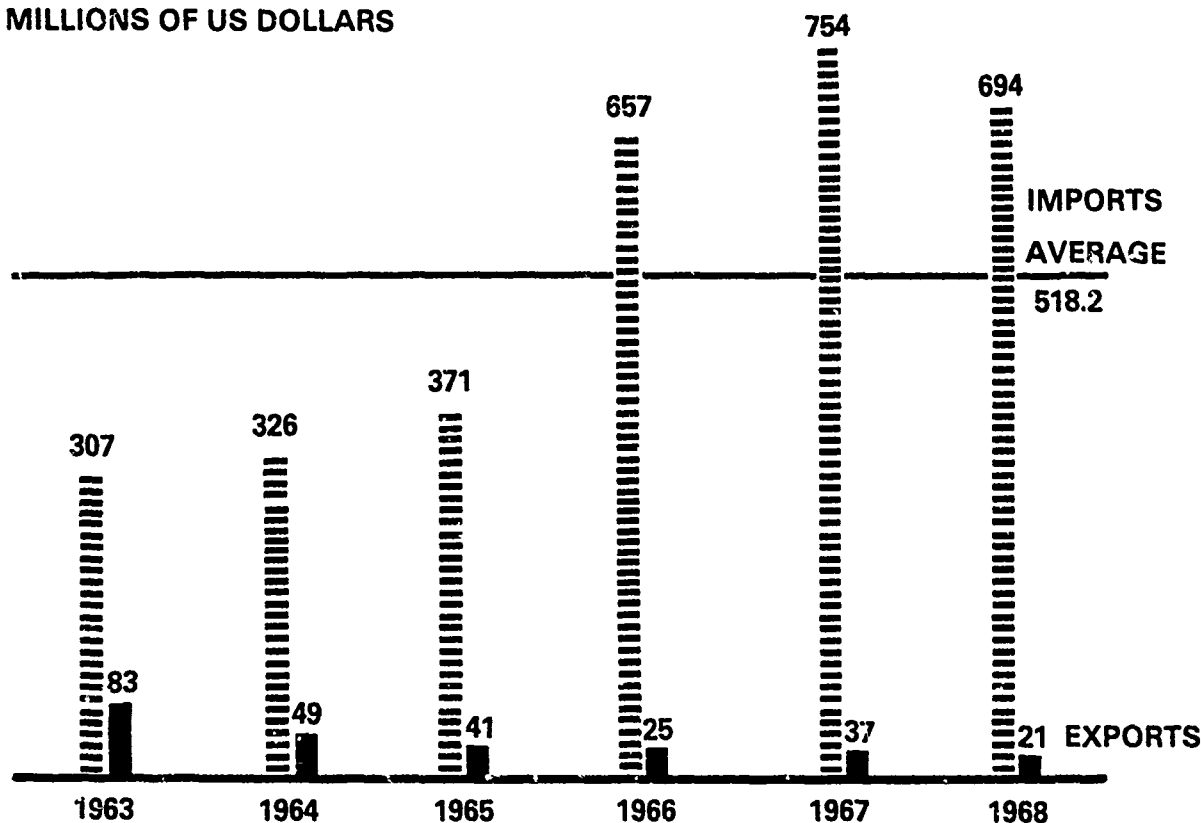
The US Embassy in Saigon and MACV were very concerned with the inflationary pressures created by the war and the US presence. Finally giving in to persistent US advice, the GVN belatedly devalued the piaster by 50% in June 1966 and curbed the rapid growth of the money supply. This and other measures had a temporary salutary effect, and the consumer prices in Saigon only rose 4% during the last five months of 1966.27/

Americans serving in Vietnam prior to the 1965 buildup could easily convert US currency to piasters for amounts well above the official change rate. In August 1965 scrip, or Military Payment Certificates (MPC), was issued to all US military and civilian personnel in lieu of dollars. This gambit temporarily helped to relieve the black market problem, but the blackmarket operators quickly adjusted and scrip soon became a useful medium of exchange, though at a lower rate than for greenbacks. The data from a USG study (Figure 4-5) is probably conservative. Testimony before a Senate Subcommittee in November 1969 disclosed that the blackmarket rate for one US dollar went up to 240 piasters.28/

In 1969 a new issue of scrip was introduced on a surprise basis. All US and allied personnel in RVN were required to exchange their old MPCs for a like amount of the new MPC within a 12-hour period. Amounts in

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MILLIONS OF US DOLLARS

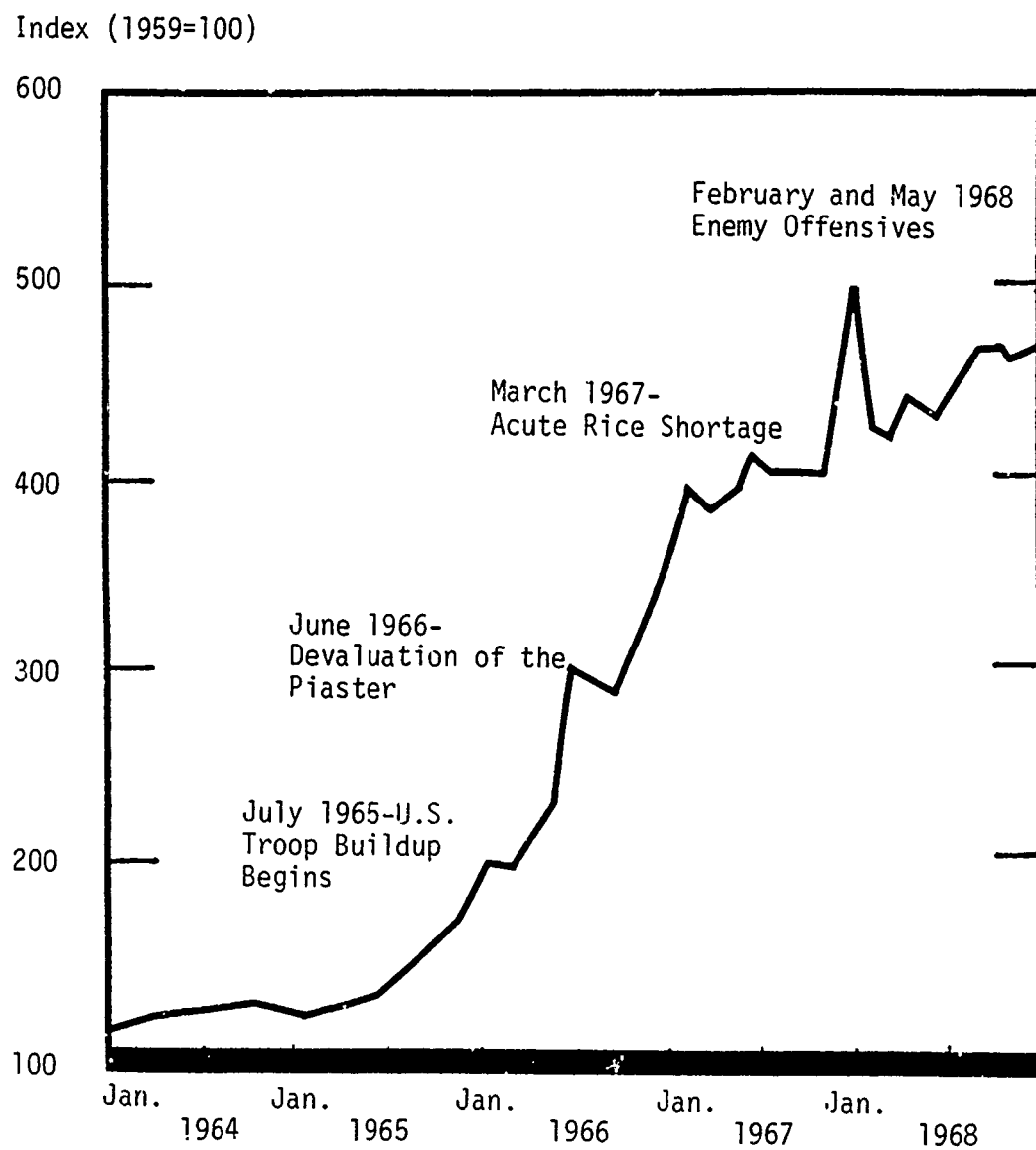


NOTE:

IN GENERAL, AS THE WAR ESCALATED IMPORTS INCREASED AND EXPORTS DIMINISHED; THE SLIGHT DECREASE IN IMPORTS IN 1968 WAS DUE TO THE INVENTORY BUILDUP IN 1967 AND THE CONTRACTION OF BUSINESS RESULTING FROM THE TET OFFENSIVE.

4541/78W

Figure 4-3. Imports and Exports (Less Military Goods), 1963-1968



SOURCE: National Intelligence Survey, 43D, Oct. 1969.

Figure 4-4. Index of Saigon Consumer Prices

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	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>
	<u>PIASTERS</u>			
SAIGON:				
US DOLLARS.....	146	180	164	184
SCRIP (MPC).....	*	118	115	129
GOLD**.....	192	158	206	259
HCNG KONG:				
US DOLLAR-PIASTER CROSSRATE***...	133	158	151	182
NOTE - DATA ARE AVERAGE OF MONTHLY RATES				

\* THE USE OF SCRIP DID NOT BEGIN UNTIL 31 AUGUST 1965.

\*\* PRICE FOR 1/35th TROY OUNCE OF GOLD LEAF.

\*\*\* US DOLLAR-PIASTER EXCHANGE RATE IN HONG KONG CALCULATED BY REFERENCE TO THE EXCHANGE RATES OF THESE TWO CURRENCIES TO THE HONG KONG DOLLAR.

SOURCE: US Congress, Senate, Vietnam: May 1974, pp. 29-39

Figure 4-5. Black Market Exchange Rates (U/OU)  
(Piasters per US dollar)

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excess of \$200 had to be justified, subject to close scrutiny. The purpose of the surprise exchange was to freeze out or make worthless the black-market MPC illegally in the hands of Vietnamese, Chinese, etc., as well as any unexplained amounts held by Americans in excess of the \$200 limit. Many small-time operators no doubt suffered financial setbacks, but it was apparent that the MPC situation would likely be stabilized for a long period and blackmarket currency activities quickly resumed.<sup>29/</sup>

Since the vast majority of foreigners in RVN were US military, MACV had to implement a wide range of restrictive measures to include:

### 1966 30/

- An attractive savings program
- An increase in the number of PX's and the variety of goods offered (unfortunately a good many of these luxury goods ended up on the blackmarket).
- A Rest and Recuperation (R&R) Program which expanded to include out-of-country locations such as Hawaii.
- Close coordination with GVN and RVNAF officials at all levels to encourage price control measures.
- A reluctant acceptance of plaster expenditure ceilings which had the effect of restricting the build-up rate of US and RVNAF forces.

### 1967 31/

- In order to reduce the adverse impact of the large US military presence in Saigon and other large cities on their society and economy, MACV implemented Operation Moose (Move Out of Saigon Expeditiously).

In a little over a year this program almost halved the 12,700 US military in Saigon by moving them to newly constructed localities at Tan Son Nhut, Long Binh, and Newport.

An important decision was made in 1967 which had a marked impact on the war as well as on the South Vietnamese society and economy. CORDS (Civil Operation and Revolutionary Development Support) was established under COMUSMACV with the energetic Ambassador Robert Komer as its chief.



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It was the hybrid civil military structure which imposed unified single management on all the diffuse[d] U.S. pacification programs and provided a single channel of advice at each level to GVN counterparts.32/

One of the reasons for CORDS' existence was to ensure that US economic aid was employed effectively and for the purposes intended. Significant improvements were made but the large number of indifferent, inefficient, and/or corrupt GVN officials at each level continued to impede progress; most of the province and district chiefs were military officers who were improperly trained and often poorly motivated for solving complex social and economic problems.

#### 4. Implications for the Economy and the War

The massive US military effort in Indochina unquestionably prevented the fall of RVN in 1965, and then steadily reversed the balance of power in the area. Unfortunately, however, our ways of life and war had a serious detrimental effect on the society and economy of RVN.

The following excerpts from the post-war reflections of two ex-Generals in RVNAF, although naturally somewhat biased, are close to the mark and deserve serious consideration:

As a result of the American buildup, a great number of people turned to activities directly or indirectly connected with services for U.S. units and troops. These were contractors, entrepreneurs, businessmen, and some civilian employees serving in U.S. organizations. Because of lucrative service contracts and business dealings, these people gained sizeable incomes, and many rapidly amassed great fortunes. High income and quick wealth also turned these people into a new privileged urban class, a class by itself that never existed in Vietnamese society before.

Another emerging social element was the prostitutes and bar girls whose numbers quickly multiplied with the buildup of U.S. troops. Socially considered the basest and most contemptible, these elements seemed to take to the good material life with a revenge. With the good and easy money they made, they spent it in far-out fashions and a flashy, abandoned life style which exerted a bad influence on women and led many among them, the gullible and the morally loose, to

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follow in their sinful steps. This unwittingly upset the usually puritan mores of traditional South Vietnamese society.

The next privileged social group consisted of civilian employees serving in U.S. organizations whose salaries were two or three times larger than those of GVN civil servants or servicemen. This disparity in income coupled with a most lopsided distribution of wealth was a major source of frustration and social injustice. The civil servants, servicemen, and policemen, those who received fixed and much lower salaries, considered themselves and were in fact the most under privileged elements of society. They were understandably frustrated because the compensation they were receiving did not measure up to the sacrifices and contributions they made for the sake of the country's survival. By contrast, the people who made the most money were those who practically contributed nothing to the war effort.

As a result of U.S. aid benefits and the free-flowing money spent by U.S. troops, the urban society of South Vietnam became more and more materialistic-oriented. Material wealth eventually became the yardstick by which human fulfillment was measured. As people attached more value to material acquisition, morality suffered a great setback. This materialistic race involved the majority of urban people, including those so-called spiritual leaders and custodians of morality.<sup>33/</sup>

These observations speak clearly of the social and economic and thus political impacts of the pervasive US presence in RVN.

### E. THIEU AND KY (1967-1972) 34/

#### 1. More Stability

The combination of Ky and Thieu brought a welcome degree of stability to GVN starting in 1966. Despite the animosity between the two, the election in 1967 of Thieu as President with Ky as his Vice President restored an aura of legitimacy to GVN and established a basis for an economic upturn.

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### 2. Tet 1968 and Mobilization

The country-wide wave of enemy offensives, starting with Tet in 1968, produced a severe but only temporary setback to the economy of South Vietnam. Since much of the heavy fighting took place in and near the major cities and towns, the small but precious light industrial base was damaged severely; the industrial complexes at Saigon and Bien Hoa particularly were ravaged. It was estimated that 50 to 60 percent of the textile production capacity was destroyed.<sup>35/</sup> For example, after the aborted attack on Tan Son Nhut airbase, a major enemy unit took refuge in the nearby Vinatexco Textile plant; both the enemy and the factories were destroyed by allied air and artillery attack. The harvest and distribution of rice were hampered by the concentration of RVNAF for the protection of the cities and major towns. The offensive also had an adverse impact on the important fish crop which in the first half of 1968 was 15% lower than in the similar period in 1967. For this reason and due to the influx of refugees to the urban areas, fish prices in Saigon in December 1968 were five to six times higher than they were in 1965.<sup>36/</sup>

In its annual report to the US Ambassador, the US aid mission to RVN summed up quite well both the damage inflicted on the economy of RVN by the big battles in 1968, and the amazing recuperative powers of the South Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese economy displayed remarkable resilience in 1968. Despite the extensive disruptions in the economy caused by the Tet offensive in February and the Spring offensives which destroyed over four billion piasters worth of industrial capital and raw materials the scars of these attacks were, by November, fairly well healed. The rise in the price level, as of mid-November, was only around 30 percent, in spite of the introduction of the war to the urban areas, a 50 percent increase in the money supply, and a 30 percent increase in the number of Vietnamese in military service. Commercial activity and business confidence recovered substantially during the second half of the year.<sup>37/</sup>

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Another result of the Tet offensive was to provide GVN with both the will and the mandate to decree total mobilization. The increased draft calls, in addition to the war-induced streams of refugees, absorbed yet more of the available farm labor. USAID reported that:

The event during this past calendar year that had the greatest impact on the allocation of human resources was the General Mobilization Decree, basically covering men from 18 to 38 years of age. This had the almost immediate effect of exacerbating the already serious shortage of critical skills in the Republic of Vietnam. Heeding US advice GVN did institute ... a system of occupational deferments for key civilian positions.3d/

This drain was compensated for, in part, by the continued high desertion rate; very few of the deserters went over to the enemy, but rather disappeared in the cities or went back to their home villages where many joined the local militia.

With strong US aid and advice, GVN reacted surprisingly quickly and effectively, through "operation recovery" to counter what might well have been a crippling blow.

In statistical terms the effect of the Tet offensive which started in January and the second enemy offensive in the spring was staggering. In human terms it was catastrophic.

- 12,696 civilians were killed.
- 20,000 were wounded.
- Nearly one million evacuees were created.
- Property with an estimated value in excess of \$173 million dollars was damaged or destroyed in the two offensives.

The Government of Vietnam responded swiftly to the emergency. On February 2, at the height of the crisis, President Thieu announced the formation of a Central Recovery Committee to coordinate and expedite all

recovery and reconstruction efforts. Its major goals, which were met by October, included:

- providing food, clothing, and shelter for those forced to evacuate their homes.
- returning Saigon and other principal cities, provincial capitals, and district towns to pre-Tet conditions.
- undertaking special measures to open, secure and repair major lines of communications, such as highways and waterways.
- developing a national spirit of unity in accomplishing recovery measures.<sup>39/</sup>

3. Pacification and Land Reform <sup>40/</sup>

The aftermath of the Tet offensive also provided the impetus and the climate for an acceleration in the GVN pacification program, which included for the first time real and effective land reform. Prodded and assisted by the aggressive CORDS field teams, the interlocking programs began to gather an effective momentum. The defeat of the enemy main force units and especially the decimation of the almost irreplaceable political-military cadre of the NLF resulted in a partial vacuum in large expanses of the countryside which increasingly was filled by GVN.

The introduction of Miracle Rice in 1969 provided another welcome boon to the economy, even though the impact was not immediate. (The initial harvest yielded an increase of 150% per hectares) <sup>41/</sup> The significant drop in rice imports in 1969 as depicted in Fig. 4-1 was deceiving. Actually, as reported by the US Embassy, the rice stocks in 1969 were well below those of 1968; the 50% reduction previously was due to the release of 200,000 metric tons of reserve stock.<sup>42/</sup>

By the end of the year most of the key roads in RVN had been reopened and crops could be harvested and transported to market practically undisturbed.

4. Vietnamization and U.S. Withdrawal

The US Vietnamization program was not concerned solely with the improvement of RVNAF, as generally believed, but also included an

accelerated scheme to upgrade the economy. In this arena, as in the military, perhaps too much was attempted too fast and was predicated on US, not Vietnamese, ways and means. Ex-Vice President and Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, in his memoirs, discussed the plans to increase the production of rice, rubber, and livestock and to provide more equitable land distribution. He also quotes the unknown Vietnamese who supposedly told an American adviser: "It's fine to talk about long-term plans for agriculture, forestry, fishing and so on, but we're in trouble right now. You've never thought of really teaching instead of just building things."43/

The withdrawal of US troops and the closing or turning over of large bases to SVN created a surge of unemployment. Those who worked for the US had received relatively high wages and other benefits, which had raised their life styles and expectations well above the level that could be met by GVN. This situation thus created both economic hardships and political problems.

5. Land to the Tiller (LTTT)

In an agrarian-based economy long dominated by wealthy and mostly absentee landlords - first French and later native - no program could have a greater social, economic, and political impact than that of equitable and efficient land reform. Diem and his US advisers recognized this need early as did Thieu much later. There was encouraging progress in this arena at both ends of the short life of the republic; in the nine crucial mid-years political instability and the nature and intensity of the conflict foiled attempts to implement sound and lasting land reform programs.

In its third, and last, report to the US Congress on the subject of land reform, the GAO commented that:

The GVN land reform program was relatively strong from 1954 to 1961 but between 1962 and 1969 little real progress took place.

A law passed in March 1970 marked the beginning of considerable GVN land reform activity.

Under the LTTT program, 1,007,217 hectares had been distributed to about 650,000 tenant farmers as of

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March 1973. This exceeded the initial goal for 1 million hectares. There was more distribution in southern Vietnam than in central Vietnam.

Only time will tell whether program beneficiaries will support GVN politically. Preliminary research indicates that new landowners are becoming more closely associated with village and national governments. Also they are progressing economically.

The Montagnard land reform program has made slow progress. It has been carried out poorly, has not received adequate GVN support, and has received a disproportionately low share of U.S. support.<sup>44</sup>

The report also noted that through 31 March 1973 the US had contributed about \$38 million and GVN the equivalent of \$203.6 million to the LTTT program. While the sum represented a relatively large investment, it was paltry compared to the cost of the fighting.

From mid-1973 on the drastic reductions in US aid, increasing corruption, the growing unpopularity of Thieu, and the reescalation of the war severely constrained land reform. Thus, the program which might have administered the coup de grace to the NLF never had a real chance to mature.

### 6. More Corruption

Although discussed earlier in this chapter, corruption should be mentioned again since it played such an important role in the dilution/distortion of US plans, in the deterioration of the RVN society, and in the lack of respect for and the effectiveness of GVN. In his book, Ky wrote an entire chapter on the subject titled: "Corruption: The PX Millionaires." In it he sketches the breadth and depth of this officially condoned and pervasive sapping of the character and strength of the GVN and the RVNAF. Nothing was exempt from theft and/or the blackmarket - PX goods, drugs, commercial imports, or even military weapons and stores. He relates how a full truckload with tons of US scrip was stolen at Tan Son Nhut. In a telling commentary he wrote, "Certainly corruption was rife in Vietnam, but what other country is free from corruption. It is a question of degree, really."<sup>45</sup> His testimony as to the scale of corruption and its corrosive

effects is well documented by other Vietnamese refugees 46/ and by numerous American sources.

7. Implications for the Economy and the War

The years 1969 through 1971 have been labelled the "Golden Era of RVN" and there was some substance to that title. The political, military, and economic situations were relatively favorable and were even improving. Yet by no means was RVN close to achieving economic self-sufficiency; there was no conceivable way in which they alone could support a war effort of the type and scope dictated by the DRV as long as the latter continued to receive huge amounts of war materiel from the USSR and the PRC while US aid declined (See Fig. 4-6). Additionally there were cracks in the facade which were overlooked by many US officials who were optimistically determined that GVN and RVNAF could "hack it". Among these flaws were the ubiquitous corruption and the growing fear that the US was withdrawing too much too fast.

From the enemy's point of view, however, the picture was rather gloomy as it appeared that both Pacification and Vietnamization were working to their disadvantage. They decided to administer a sharp test, and hopefully a setback, to both. Their response was the massive and conventional Easter offensive of 1972 which RVNAF, with US support, eventually defeated.

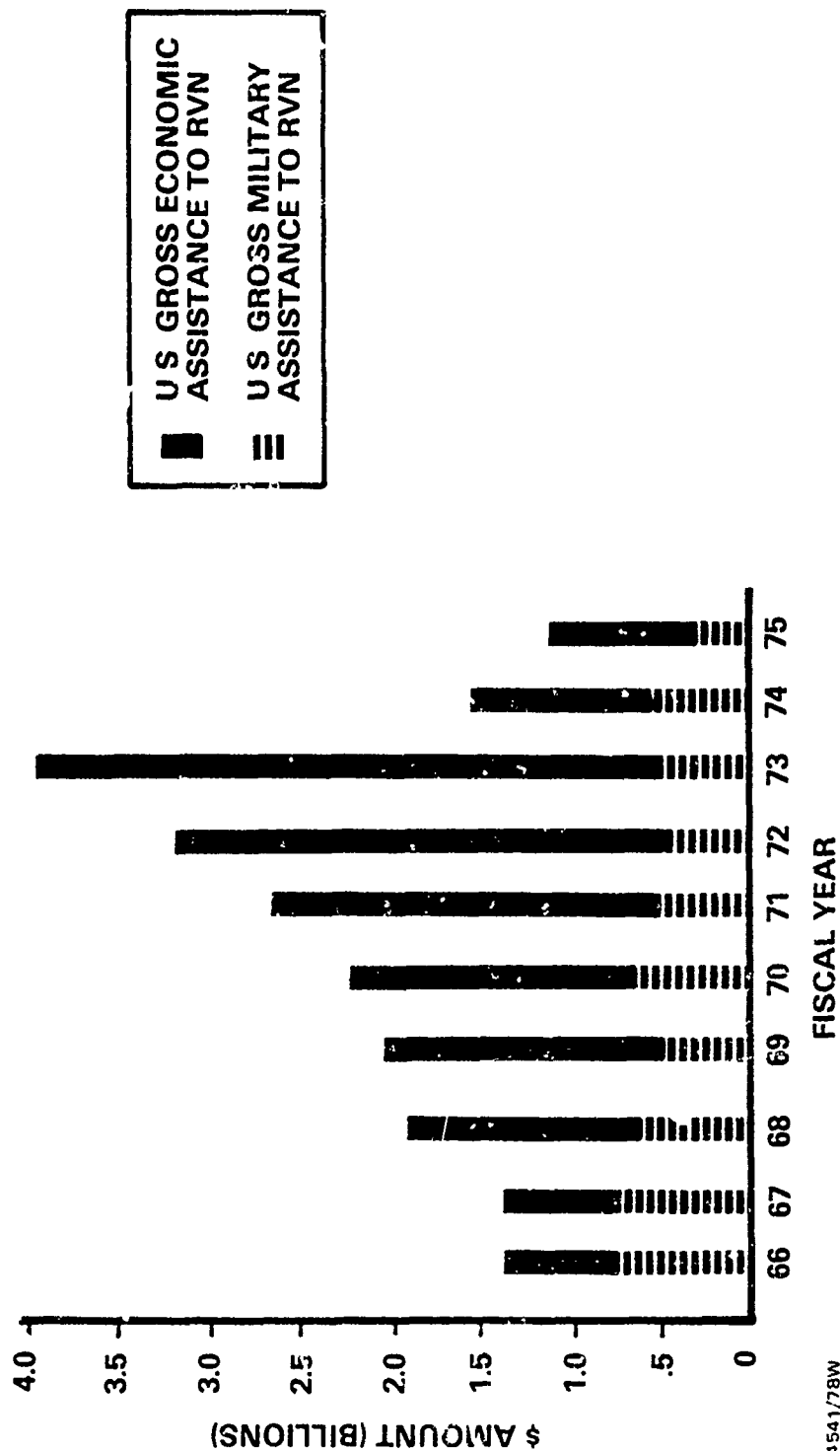
F. THE SLIDE DOWNHILL (1973-1975) 47/

1. Paris, Washington and Watergate

Pride and self confidence in the RVNAF and among much of the population reached a peak after the defeat of the DRV's Easter offensive. President Thieu, among others in GVN, had no illusions about the ability of RVNAF to stand up alone against a still-expanding and modernizing PAVN, especially if an in-place ceasefire were permitted. Thieu was pressured into accepting the January 1973 Paris Accords by a mix of sticks and carrots; the US was willing to sign without him if necessary and could reduce or cut off aid at will, but he was promised continued military and



BEGINNING IN 1972 OPERATION ENHANCE DUMPED  
HUGH QUANTITIES OF SUPPLIES AND MATERIAL  
ON THE GVN, WELL BEYOND THEIR CAPABILITY TO  
ABSORB IT.



SOURCES: Indochina Refugee Authoried Monograph Program, RVNMF Logistics;  
US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Vietnam May 1972

Figure 4-6. US Assistance to South Vietnam

economic aid and a powerful military riposte if the DRV broke the agreements.

The US people and their Congress generally were tired of Vietnam and the war and also of the presidential stranglehold on foreign and military affairs. The increasingly truculent Congress imposed severe constraints on the Executive Branch's freedom of action: first through restrictive amendments, then via the War Powers Act, and finally by the sharp reduction of military aid to RVN. (See again Fig. 4-6).

The Watergate crisis first crippled and then crushed President Nixon and severely constrained President Ford, thus leaving the Congress with a virtually unopposed veto on US actions in Southeast Asia.

2. Foreign Aid: The US vs the USSR and the PRC

After the crash program (Operations Enhance and Enhance Plus) for providing as much military equipment and supplies as possible to RVNAF before the January 1973 ceasefire, US military aid fell off dramatically. A number of weapons, combat vehicles, etc. which were lost in the fighting in 1973 and 1974 were not replaced even though a one-for-one replacement was permitted by the Paris Accords.<sup>48/</sup>

The USSR, and to a lesser extent the PRC, continued to supply large quantities of modern arms and copious amounts of ammunition, fuel, and food to the DRV. Between the ceasefire and the final offensive PAVN increased impressively in both size and quality, to include those units left in their enclaves in the RVN. In these two years the balance of forces shifted decisively in their favor.<sup>49/</sup>

3. Inflation and Oil 50/

The oil embargo which resulted from the October 1973 Mid-east War fueled inflation worldwide, but hit the RVN especially hard at a critical time in its fight for survival. At the same time that US aid was decreasing, the prices of such essentials as ammunition and oil were rising rapidly.

4. Implications for the Economy and the War

The increased cost and decreased supply of oil products had an adverse effect on both the economy and the morale of RVN. Trucks, cars,

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and Hondas had become "necessities" to many of the South Vietnamese. The traditional charcoal fuel had been largely replaced in the urban areas by oil and kerosene for cooking and heating. Tractors and mechanical tillers had been supplied in large numbers by the US and had replaced, in many rural areas, the water buffalo; spare parts for these machines also were in short supply.<sup>51/</sup> In the delta regions, the rural population had become increasingly dependent on gasoline motors for their sampans. The inevitable results of these twin blows were acute shortages and "galloping inflation" as one refugee termed it. Thieu's belated, and generally ineffective, efforts at austerity and more self-sufficiency made him even more unpopular; it is likely that he would have been overthrown by a military coup if it hadn't been for unequivocal US support.<sup>52/</sup>

The rapid withdrawal of the US CORDS advisers left unfillable gaps at every GVN level down to the hamlet. After "selling" US methods and means, and after doing the bulk of the planning for and the supervision of projects, out of desire and pressure for speed and positive results, there was no way these US advisers could be replaced by the generally less-educated and motivated GVN officials; this problem was exacerbated because many of these officials' primary concern was to remain in power long enough to provide well for their families and their future. Also, when the advisers departed so did most of the abundant resources which helped create the general impression of progress.

Two ex-ARVN generals stated the overall economic dilemma facing RVN quite concisely:

The GVN policy of overflowing the domestic market with imported goods because of budgetary needs did not help build an economy geared for long range development. So when the U.S. began to reduce its involvement, South Vietnamese economic and social difficulties remained very much the same if not more serious.<sup>53/</sup>

They understated the case. If the South Vietnamese economy had become overly dependent on US advice and support, so much more so had the RVNAF. They had, in effect, become spoiled by seemingly inexhaustible US resources and the use of expensive material means to save sweat and blood;

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they had "forgotten how to walk" and could not or would not relearn in time. GVN and RVNAF attempts to preserve irreplaceable stocks of munitions and fuel during the fierce but limited battles of 1974 increased the cost in lives, and resulted in an accelerating decline in morale. The ex-chairman of the RVNAF Joint General Staff (JGS), General Cao Van Vien, spells out in detail in his monograph the impact of the reductions in US aid on mobility, firepower, and - of more importance - on the will to resist.<sup>54/</sup> Even Senior General Dung, the principal PAVN planner and commander of the final offensive, had to admit that "Thieu was forced to fight a poor man's war".<sup>55/</sup>

Even though RVNAF still retained considerable military means in the spring of 1975, the moral fibre of both the society and the military of RVN had practically disintegrated before the enemy struck his first strong blow.

It seemed as if the vicious and drawn-out war had drained South Vietnam of all its vital resources and brought it to the brink of moral and material bankruptcy. So when the U.S. Congress decided it no longer desired to support a continuing war, most people could readily sense that the fate had been sealed for South Vietnam.<sup>56/</sup>

The Economic section of the US Embassy in Saigon sent this descriptive, but low key, comment to Washington on 1 April 1975:

Owing to the many uncertainties in the present situation the mission will forego the preparation of the quarterly economic review which would normally be due at this time.<sup>57/</sup>

### G. SUMMARY AND INSIGHTS

The weak RVN economy had a restraining effect on the war effort, but the war as fought, by both friends and foe, had an even more adverse impact on that economy. At several critical stages of its twenty-plus years of existence, the RVN well might have been "captured" by the NLF or the DRV without major bloodshed; in every case but the last, massive US aid and

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presence prevented a collapse and takeover, conversely the US and GVN never solved the inherent economic shortcomings and in fact added to many of them. The major insights which emerged from the data and analyses presented in this chapter are summarized below:

- A divided Vietnam resulted in two unbalanced and deficient economies.
- Among other shortcomings, too few officials in GVN were experienced, efficient, dedicated, and honest enough to plan for and administer effectively a feeble economy in a wartime environment; whether they could have succeeded in doing so during peace is a matter of conjecture.
- The efforts of the RVN to produce some of the essentials (textiles, petrochemicals, cement, coal, etc.), previously provided by the northern half, were soon overtaken and overshadowed by the fighting.
- The economic warfare tactics pursued by the NLF/PLAF - and later the PAVN - seriously reduced the production, transport, and sale of the RVN's major economic assets - rice and rubber.
- The pervasive political instability in RVN, after Diem, created many and magnified all of the economic problems in the South.
- The large number of Western troops modified and strained the agrarian-based economy, and fueled wartime inflation by their insatiable demands for services and retail goods.
- Conversely, this demand for goods and services absorbed many of the unemployed refugees generated by the severe fighting; later the withdrawal of US forces created a huge economic void.
- The US "Way of War" - massive firepower, search and destroy, defoliation, etc. - created hundreds of thousands of refugees and resulted in severe damage to rice fields, plantations, and forests.
- The extremely heavy manpower demands of the interwoven conventional/unconventional war were in direct conflict with those of the labor-intensive agrarian economy, particularly in competition

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for the extremely limited pool of skilled manpower required to make it function efficiently.

- The war, the US "way of life", the numerous US employees, and the import programs created an urban consumer society which, like the government, became increasingly dependent on a large US presence and abundant aid.
- Under Diem and much later under Thieu, large and serious land reform programs were begun which initially produced encouraging progress; but due to political instability, corruption, the intensity of the conflict, and later the reduction of US aid, the programs which might have broken the back of the NLF never fully matured.
- After the 1973 ceasefire, the drastic reductions in US military and economic aid pulled out the only real props which had supported the feeble RVN economy; corruption and the oil embargo added fuel to the spiraling inflation which eventually might have toppled the GVN without a battle.
- The RVN became dependent on the infrastructure - bases, roads, bridges, air and sea ports, etc. - left in RVN by the US but its scope was more than the GVN/RVNAR could absorb, and further stretched the finite resources available for their protection and maintenance.

### H. LESSONS

- An agrarian-based economy is labor intensive, relatively inflexible, and is acutely sensitive not only to the hazards of nature but also to the demands of large-scale warfare; further it is quite vulnerable to the Mao-Ho concept of "People's War." (The countryside surrounds and chokes the cities).
- A large, protracted US presence, compounded by our ways of life and war, most likely will contort and eventually cripple a relatively simple agrarian-based economy and will force it to become

almost totally dependent on massive and sustained US aid; eventually the situation will become irreversible without the ruthless application of harsh and possibly even totalitarian countermeasures.

- Attempts at "nation building" (e.g. diversification, expansion and modernization of the economy) during an all-out insurgency, particularly when it is supported by powerful external forces, is likely to be not only futile but also counterproductive in terms of priorities, resources and frustrated expectations. Possibly one should more realistically plan for "nation maintenance" until the overall balance of power is solidly in favor of the government under attack. By no means does this proposition imply that the response to the threat should be exclusively, or even primarily, military - at the expense of political, psychological, economic and social offensives - but rather it suggests that nation building, as we conceived of it in Vietnam, was unrealistic, untimely and wasteful.
- Economic policies directed towards the modernization and expansion of a basically agrarian economy, during a large scale insurgency or war, especially in an unstable political environment, most likely will produce a misallocation of scarce human and material resources and create unwarranted, and eventually unfulfilled economic expectations; in the end the economy, the society and the war effort all suffer.

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14. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh, and Tran Dinh Tho, ARVN, The South Vietnamese Society, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, Prepared for



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Dept. of Army, Office of Chief of Military History, (McLean, Va: General Research Corp., 1978), p. 170. Hereafter Hinh and Tho, Society.

15. Duncanson, p. 239.
16. Bernard B. Fall, Lecture at Military Assistance Institute, Rosslyn, Va, July, 1960. Also, his Last Reflections on a War, (New York: Doubleday Inc., 1967), p. 201.
17. Airgram #530, U.S. Embassy Saigon to Dept. of State, May 19, 1961, p. 2.
18. DOD US/VN Relations, Book 3, IV, B. 5. pp. 27-29.
19. Air Gram A-459, U.S. Embassy Saigon to Dept. of State, Feb 3, 1964, p. 3.
20. Based on DOD US/VN Relations Book 4 and Maxwell D. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares (New York: W. N. Norton & Co., Inc., 1972). Also General Maxwell D. Taylor's papers at the National War College, and BDM interview with General Taylor at his home in Washington, D.C. on July 11, 1979.
21. John Paul Vann, a former corps adviser and later a senior CORDS official spent over nine years in RVN. He described the proliferation of Hondas and television sets throughout South Vietnam. Vann said that after the TV boom he had to have his helicopter pilot fly at a greater altitude than formerly because of the number of TV antennae jutting into the air. Tape recording of John Paul Vann's presentation to an audience from the Patterson School of Diplomacy, University of Kentucky on January 8, 1972 provided by Professor Vincent Davis.
22. LTG Carroll H. Dunn, Base Development, Dept. of Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972), p. 141.
23. GAO letter of 1 June 1974 to Daniel Parker, Administrator for AID, p. 1.  
On the more positive side, US involvement in the Vietnam war brought improvements in public health nationwide as US-sponsored MEDCAP activities were initiated. "In addition, district and village health stations and the availability of US-provided medicine for most medical treatment needs also contributed to better health for the rural peasantry. Several diseases heretofore considered fatal such as lung tuberculosis had been brought under control and were no longer incurable." Further, advances in rural education were seen as US sponsored schools were set up and as new and better textbooks were supplied. See Nguyen Duy Hinh, p. 67.

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24. MG Robert R. Ploger, US Army Engineer: 1965-1970 Dept. of Army, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1974), pp. 116-117.
25. Don Oberdorfer and George Wilson, "Burdened by War, Vietnam Seeks Aid from Soviet Union," The Washington Post, July 4, 1979, p. A20. These Washington Post staff writers report that while the Vietnamese appear to be resisting Soviet requests for permanent bases, Soviet technicians are constructing a dish antenna radio monitoring station at Cam Ranh Bay and Soviet ships and aircraft have used facilities in southern Vietnam, including the port of Danang.
26. NIS 43D, p. 122.  
An interesting comparison can be made between the Korean War and inflation in the domestic economy, and the Vietnam War and inflation. The data show that inflation was far higher in Korea during the Korean War than it was in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Examination of why inflation was less of a problem in Vietnam reveals interesting insights. Although the pervasive US presence (US personnel and US goods) in Vietnam and especially in Saigon has been labeled a major cause of the troublesome inflation in Vietnam, it seems that in comparison to Korea, US programs to curb inflation in Vietnam achieved positive results. This is not to say that the inflation in Vietnam was negligible - it was not - but in comparison to the Korean War period, US actions taken to help to curb inflation in South Vietnam were relatively more successful. See Thomas Thayer, "War Without Fronts," Journal of Defense Research, Fall 1975. pp. 933-936.
27. Ibid, p. 120.
28. Memorandum for the Record, subject: "Senate Hearings on NCO Club Irregularities," Office of the Special Assistant For Congressional Affairs, Hdqtrs, U.S. Army Material Command, Nov. 1969, p. 4.
29. Observations made by members of the study team who served in Vietnam at various times between 1960 and 1972.
30. Commander in Chief, Pacific, and Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Report on the War in Vietnam, (Jan 1964-Jun 1968), Washington, D.C.: GPO, Jun 1968), p. 119.
31. Ibid, pp. 146-147.
32. R. W. Komer, Bureaucracy Does its Thing: The Impact of Institutional Constraints on US/CVN Performance in the Vietnam War, Rand Report #WN-7244 ARPA, Feb. 1971, (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corp., 1971), p. 50, and Douglas Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era, (New York: The Free Press, 1977).

33. Hinh and Tho, Society, pp. 68-69.  
The observations of a US Senate Committee study team which reviewed the economy of South Vietnam, US economic aid and prospects for economic recovery noted the following difference of opinion among US officials both in Washington and in Saigon concerning the country's economy:

American officials whose primary responsibilities lie in the policy area approach the problem in terms of gross amounts of US assistance required to maintain a viable economy ... officials, both American and foreign, whose professional specialty is economic development, invariably focus on what many of them refer to as the "structural" problems of the Vietnamese economy, by which they mean to refer to its lack of productivity, the displacement of its labor force, the imbalance between imports and foreign exchange earnings and its lack of ability to stimulate investment and growth.

An examination of the problems and merits of each approach is found in US Congress, Senate, Vietnam: May 1974, pp. 39-42.

34. In a staff report prepared in 1974 for use by the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, the authors write:

The fundamental economic problem of South Vietnam is that it lacks the economic resources to support either its present level of fiscal expenditure or its domestic consumption. It is unable to generate enough revenue to finance its fiscal budget and it is unable to meet fully its domestic economic needs nor afford to import the goods to meet these needs.

The direct effects upon the population are seen in the 65% inflation in 1973, in the unemployment rate which runs as high as 40 to 50% and in the declining standards of living. See US Congress, Senate, Vietnam: May 1974, pp. 25-26.

35. NIS 43D, p. 115.
36. Ibid, p. 111.
37. 1968 Report to the Ambassador, from the Director of the United States Agency for International Development Vietnam, January 10, 1969, p. 13. The Joint US Public Affairs Office in Saigon published a pamphlet, One Year Later: The Rebirth of Hue in which optimism is the keynote of the successful recovery operation following the devastating attacks on Hue. A caption of one of the photos depicting an idyllic scene in the pamphlet reads "One year after the 1968 Tet Offensive, the City of Hue

has been completely reconstructed, its economy recovered, its transportation re-established, security restored, and life is much brighter than before."

38. Ibid., both quotations are found on p. 28 of The AID Report.
39. Ibid., p. 5.
40. "During the Second Republic rural development was elevated to a national strategy. Peasants received assistance and care. Wherever security was established there appeared schools, dispensaries, information halls, and tractors." See Nguyen Duy Hinh, p. 51.
41. Ibid., p. 17.
42. Airgram, AID, A7039, U.S. Embassy Saigon to Dept. of State, Feb. 5, 1970.
43. Nguyen Cao Ky, Twenty Years and Twenty Days, (New York: Stein & Day, 1976), pp. 176-177.  
Other problems surfaced for the South Vietnamese as the Vietnamization program and US withdrawal were underway. The following illustrates the dilemma facing South Vietnamese planners:

The Americans gave the South Vietnamese a military machine that was inherently costly to maintain and operate, and then wanted them to reduce military costs and operate with far less aid. The Americans wanted South Vietnam to demobilize men to transfer them to the civilian economy, while the enemy was increasing its military strength. This attempt to build a political and economic showcase in the midst of a hard war was regarded as unrealistic, and some South Vietnamese officials apparently felt squeezed - or in some cases suspended - between high-flown American plans and hard military, economic, and political realities.

Stephen T. Hosmer, et al., The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, December 1978), p. 130.

44. Report to the Congress, "Progress of U.S. Assistance for Land Reform in Vietnam" by the Comptroller General of the United States, June 23, 1973, p. 1.  
Prior to 1970 and the initiation of LTTT, South Vietnam had one of the world's highest tenancy rates. The GVN estimated that approximately 60 percent of all the rice and secondary-crop land was being farmed by tenant farmers who did not own the land... The total amount of rice land in South Vietnam was 2.3 million hectares. Between 1956 and 1973,

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sixty-five percent of it was redistributed.... The Land-to-the-Tiller Program in three years dropped land tenancy in South Vietnam from 60 percent of cropland down to 10 percent - and the CVN still continued to distribute land.... The land reform program carried out in South Vietnam, in the midst of a war, was a remarkable accomplishment.

Thomas Thayer in his work "How to Analyze a War Without Fronts, Vietnam 1965-72", Journal of Defense Research, Fall 1975 devotes a full chapter to the issue of land reform in South Vietnam. Against a discussion of the land reform programs engaged in by the GVN, Thayer juxtaposes the communist "land reform" strategy designed to gain the support of the rural population.

45. Ky, p. 114.
46. Hosmer, Stephen T., et al.
47. South Vietnam's economy began to decline in 1971. Several reasons for the downward trend are described in US Congress, House, Vietnam - A Changing Crucible, Report of a Study Mission to South Vietnam (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1974), pp. 8-9. The report cites three principal factors, the North Vietnamese 1972 offensive, the loss of dollar earnings from the US troop withdrawal, and accelerating inflation of world commodity prices as having caused the decline.
48. LTG Dong Van Khuyen RVNAF Logistics, pp. 13, 411 and U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Vietnam, May 1974, p. 26.
49. Sen. Gen. Van Tien Dung, "Great Spring Victory," Foreign Broadcast Information Service, APA-76-110, June 7, 1976, Vol. 1, p. 2.
50. "The burden of this inflation has to a very important extent been carried by the South Vietnamese soldier and civil servant. Their real incomes fall between March 1972 and February 1974 by about 35 percent." See Vietnam - A Changing Crucible, pp. 8-9.
51. Khuyen, pp. 14-15.
52. The Fall of South Vietnam, pp. 22-28.
53. Hinh and Tho, Society, p. 168.
54. Gen. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, Prepared for Dent. of Army, Office of Chief of Military History (McLean, Va: General Research Corp., 1976) pp. 77-73.
55. Dung, p. 5.
56. Hinh and Tho, Society, p. 174.
57. Airgram DTZ 010340Z, U.S. Embassy Saigon to Dept. of State, April, 1975.

CHAPTER 5

THE MILITARY

How could anyone genuinely believe that the South Vietnamese people had no desire to forestall the march of totalitarianism, to maintain their freedom--however imperfect--when for years upon years they bore incredible hardships and their soldiers fought with courage and determination to do just that?

General William C. Westmoreland, 1976

The lackeys [South Vietnamese Military] of the French colonialists in former days and those of the U.S. imperialists today represent and serve only their masters' interests. They are in no way qualified to represent the South Vietnamese population whose aspirations have nothing in common with their own....The "Free State of South Vietnam" or the "Republic of Vietnam" is but a cynical creation of the U.S.

DRV Premier Pham Van Dong, 1966

A. INTRODUCTION

The history of Vietnam is replete with examples of venerable military leaders who led a nine century-long struggle for national identity and survival--often against seemingly insurmountable odds. During that protracted struggle to gain or maintain their independence, the Vietnamese were able to develop an indomitable national spirit which was manifested in repeated victories over invading hordes from the North and the conquests of the Khmer and Champa Kingdoms in the South. Notwithstanding that ancient military tradition, French superiority of arms overpowered the native armies in the region, and Cochin China became a French colony in 1862. Despite armed resistance, Annam and Tonkin also succumbed to France's force of arms. After several decades of repressive French colonial rule, the Vietnamese people gradually lost all effective resistance and native military leadership ceased--a situation which predominated until the Viet Minh guerrilla movement began in the 1940s.

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This chapter will provide a background beginning with the critical introduction of South Vietnamese personnel into the French colonial forces during the 19th century; their continued involvement with the French colonial forces until defeat by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954; continued French influence after the Geneva accords in 1954; and the period of US assistance and support after the withdrawal of the French forces until the end of the war in 1975. Emphasis will be given to the development of the South Vietnamese armed forces from the Colonial period to 1975, the development of leadership qualities during that period, and the efficiency and reliability of the forces during the period of US involvement. Also, French, Viet Minh and US influences on the growth, organization and concepts of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces will be examined.

### B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES

#### 1. Army of Vietnam (ARVN)

The history of Vietnam has been a long struggle for national survival and for the preservation of the country's cultural/ethnic and political identity. Early in its history, Vietnam was subjugated by the Chinese until its independence in 939 A.D. For almost a thousand years until its conquest by France in 1883, this era was characterized by resistance to invasion by its neighbors and by its own expansion southward from Tonkin to the delta. That era saw the development of an indigenous military leadership provided by such outstanding figures as Generals Tran Hung Dao and Le Loi, who successfully fought the Mongols in the 13th century and prevented their conquest of Vietnam. More recently such military and resistance leaders as Nguyen Hue, Hoang Dieu, and Hoang Hoa Tham fought the French from the 1860's until 1913.

After Hoang Hoa Tham's defeat in 1913, all effective resistance ceased and native military leadership was eradicated, but French occupation was not accepted by large sectors of the population; instead, it aroused an awareness of national identity which gradually grew into a full-fledged resistance movement against both the French and Japanese occupation forces

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and culminated in the Viet Minh uprising in 1945 against the reintroduction of French forces.

During the ninety or so years of French occupation, it was their policy to repress vigorously anti-French political and military initiatives undertaken by various resistance movements. Indeed, the French policy included the execution of resistance leaders. One author noted that, "By wrecking generation after generation of potential leaders with their thorough repression, the French contributed considerably to Vietnam's present political and military problems."1/

Prior to World War I, the French occupying forces included regular and colonial troops, and the "Garde Indigene" (Indigenous forces), led by French officers and NCOs. The Garde was formed primarily to guard public and private buildings and residences -- not to participate in combat operations. Local personnel were mainly recruited from the jobless and illiterate sectors of the population; they never rose to the officer rank, though a few actually attained the rank of quan, or master sergeant.

During World War I, Vietnamese were assigned non-combat duties as common laborers, drivers, and supply personnel. In World War II the French adopted new administrative policies and allowed Vietnamese college graduates to be trained as officers in the colonial army. Two military academies were established: Tong in Son Tay province in the North, and Thu Dau Mot in the South. Those Vietnamese having French citizenship could attend St. Cyr Military Academy in France. Non-commissioned officers with outstanding records were permitted to attend the Frejus Officers School in France. In effect, this program resulted in greater numbers of Vietnamese serving as junior officers and NCOs in the French colonial army in Vietnam. This situation prevailed under the Japanese occupation until March 1945 when the Japanese army took full control, causing some French units to escape into China and many Vietnamese to return to civilian life.

With the end of the war, Viet Minh resistance groups immediately took advantage of the political and military vacuum created by the departure of the Japanese, and the threat of the reoccupying French and Allied forces. On 25 September 1945, the Viet Minh made a bid to seize power in



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an "independent" Vietnam while at the same time the French, with mainly British and Chinese help, were beginning to re-establish themselves in key positions in Indochina. Under previous arrangements between World War II allies, the British disarmed the Japanese south of the 16th parallel, while the Chinese disarmed the Japanese north of this line.

The French army retook the southern sectors of Vietnam with considerable force due to heavy resistance from Viet Minh guerrillas. In the North, the French had to deal with Ho Chi Minh, now established in Hanoi and having the support of the emperor, Bao Dai. The weak military posture of Ho at this time permitted the French to take Hanoi and Haiphong by the end of 1945. However, resistance against the French increased rapidly under the control of the communists, led by Ho Chi Minh and General Giap. This resistance accelerated as the French attempted to increase their control over the North. On 19 December 1946, Ho Chi Minh called for a general war against the French by the entire population of Vietnam, north and south. Thus began the "First Vietnamese War," which was ultimately to end in the communists' tactical victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, a victory that had strategic implications because of its decisive impact psychologically in metropolitan France.

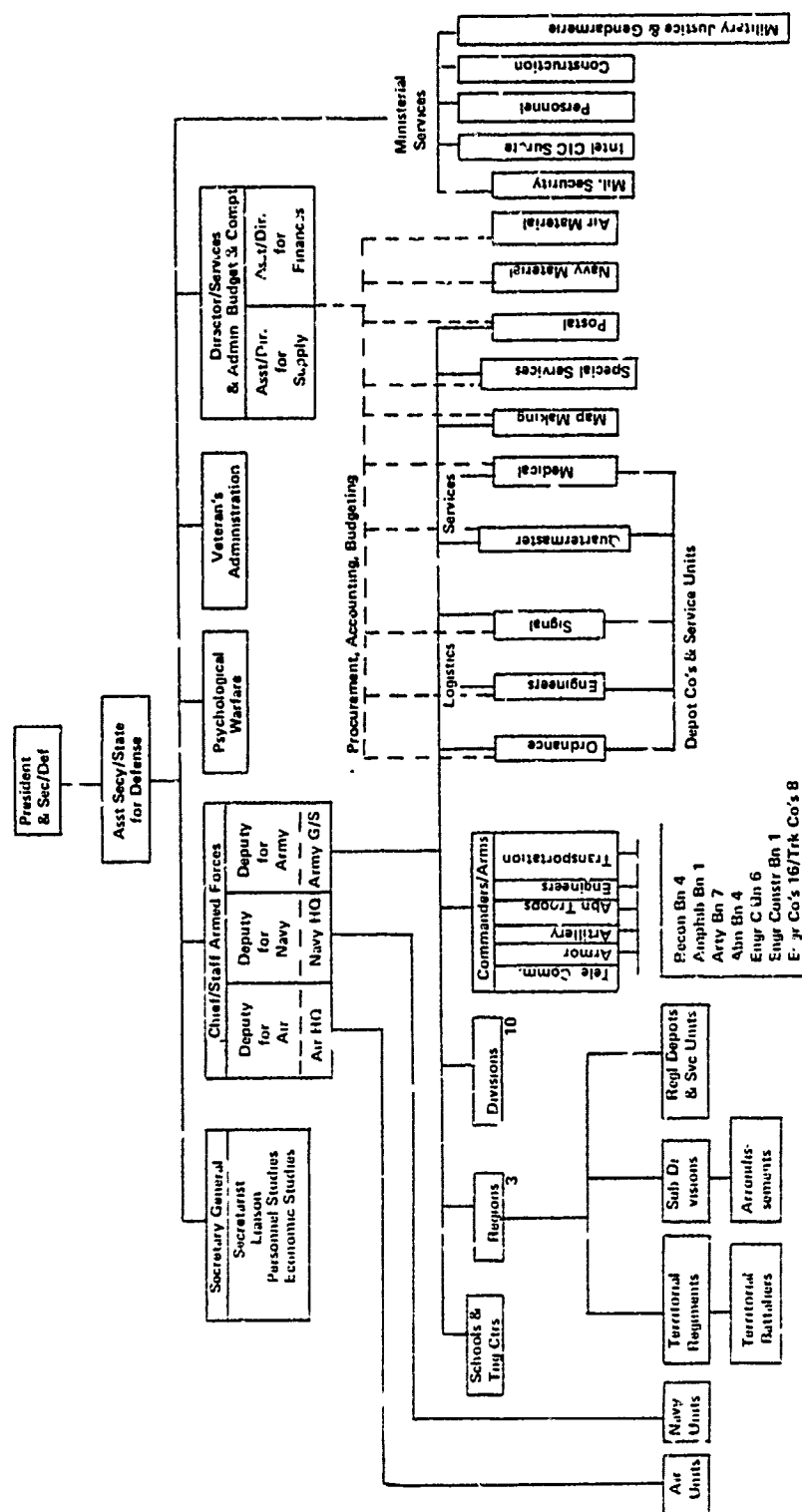
During this period (1945-46), the French created several autonomous states garrisoned by Vietnamese veterans of the Colonial army who were willing to collaborate with the French against the Viet Minh and other anti-French resistance groups. In Cochinchina, they were called the Ve Binh Cong Hoa (Republican Guard) and later renamed Ve Binh Nam Viet (South Vietnamese Guard) to reflect the French appreciation of recognizing Vietnamese national identity and to encourage greater indigenous military participation against insurgent forces. In the central and northern portions of Vietnam, similar indigenous, pro-French militia and paramilitary units were formed. Until 1950, the units were led by French officers; thereafter, Vietnamese officers and NCOs gradually replaced the French at the lower ranks and command levels. The French "Expeditionary Force" was redesignated the French "Union Forces," thus integrating indigenous personnel into a national defense force to defend Indochina.

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In 1950 the French and Vietnamese forces were divided into two major groups: the mobile French Union Forces, utilized primarily in combat roles, and the Territorial Defense Force, used mainly for local security. The latter consisted mainly of personnel from various Roman Catholic and other religious sects. May 1950 also marked the formal beginning of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces, some two years after Vietnamese independence was recognized by France in the Ho Long Day Agreement. A series of decrees by emperor Bao Dai, who had been recognized by the French as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the new state of Vietnam, provided a judicial basis for the evolving armed forces. The Ministry of National Defense, headed by a Secretary of State for National Defense, was established on 19 September 1949. The Air Force (VNAF) was authorized by decree in June 1951, the Navy in March 1952, and the Marines in October 1954. Following the Geneva Conference of 1954, the most pressing tasks faced by the fledgling National Armed Forces were deployment to the South, assumption of responsibilities from the departing French forces and the establishment of a cohesive territorial system to face the eventuality of renewed aggression by North Vietnam.

With the support of direct US economic and military assistance, South Vietnam began its task of nation building in 1955. In October of that year, Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam and installed himself as the President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The National Armed Forces of Vietnam became the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). The RVNAF command and staff organizational relationships as they existed in 1955 are shown in Figure 5-1. The RVNAF General Staff Chief controlled a 150,000-man force structure which included the following combat forces:<sup>2/</sup>

- 4 Field Divisions
- 6 Light Divisions
- 1 Airborne Brigade
- 4 Armored Cavalry Regiments
- 11 Artillery Battalions
- 13 Territorial Regiments
- 6 Infantry Regiments of Religious Troops.



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SOURCE: Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, p. 40.

Figure 5-1. Organization, Vietnamese Armed Forces, 1955

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By 1955, the US Military Assistance Advisory Group began to increase their advisory efforts while the French were reducing theirs. The US Mission had two chief objectives: (1) to create a conventional army of divisional units and supporting forces by 1 January 1956, and (2) to establish follow-through programs to increase and maintain the efficiency of that force.<sup>3/</sup> Furthermore, the combat infantry divisions were to have a dual capability of providing internal security and serving as a blocking or counterattacking force against an external attack.

South Vietnamese leadership at that time believed that in order for the defense of their nation to be effective, their military forces needed a capability to maintain territorial security and fight a mobile war at the same time.<sup>4/</sup> Therefore, in addition to the regular forces which were upgraded from mobile groups to infantry divisions in 1955, they advocated the activation of local force regiments with men recruited locally. This concept was based on the logic that these men were familiar with the geographical and social environment of their locality and, attached as they were by tradition to their native villages, they would be more dedicated to fight for their own defense if such a necessity ever arose.

The Vietnamese concept outlined above was not shared by the US Advisory officials, who maintained that the South Vietnamese Army should consist of conventional and mobile forces comprised primarily of draftees (fearing that local recruitment would make the army less mobile).<sup>5/</sup> As a result, the Army was reorganized along conventional lines with the four field divisions, and, as a measure of compromise, six light divisions, totaling 30 regular infantry regiments. All of the old auxiliary force units were deactivated. The four field divisions were to be employed to confront an expected invasion from the North, conventional-style. Moreover, the light divisions were designed primarily to conduct mobile operations for the suppression of rebels and guerrillas and for support of field division operations.

By 1958, however, the light divisions were disbanded, for, as the Chief of the US Advisory Group, Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams observed, they were not capable of confronting regular North Vietnamese

divisions.<sup>6/</sup> As a result, the ten divisions were transformed into seven standardized infantry divisions, conventionally organized, trained and equipped to fight a conventional war against an anticipated invasion by a conventional force from the North.

When fighting broke out, it did not take the form of a conventional, Korean-style invasion; rather it began as a brush-fire war fought by insurgents using subversive techniques and guerrilla tactics away from urban areas. The South Vietnamese Army found itself ill-prepared to fight this type of warfare.

In mid-1959, to meet the immediate threat posed by the communist insurgents, the GVN (at Diem's direction) activated 65 "special action" companies, which later became known as Rangers. Acting without the concurrence of US advisers, the GVN was compelled to take away one company from each 4-company infantry battalion in order to provide the necessary manpower for their Ranger forces.<sup>7/</sup> By early 1960, it became apparent to US Advisers that a special warfare capability was necessary and, thereafter, the Ranger units began to get adequate US support and training.

To assist the GVN in meeting the growing communist threat, a counterinsurgency plan was prepared for study in September 1960. The objective was to check the expansion of insurgency by modifying, re-equipping and re-training the Army. The plan's basic concept advocated the division of South Vietnam into tactical areas placed under separate military command and so structured as to exercise effective control and supervision. Security in individual areas was to be maintained by regular army units working closely and coordinating with Rangers and territorial forces. The basic guidelines developed at that time laid the foundation for all subsequent planning and actions in the years ahead.

The territorial forces, whose employment figured in counterinsurgency planning, were military organizations placed under the direct control of sector and subsector commanders to assume territorial security. Two principal components made up the forces: the Civil Guard (CG) and the Self-Defense Corps (SDC), which eventually became the Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF) in 1964. Regional Forces (RF) were basically organized

into rifle companies and augmented by other elements as required. Popular Forces (PF), on the other hand, never progressed beyond the platoon, their basic unit, and were conceived for combat in villages and hamlets. The Regional Forces served the province and the Popular Forces served the district. Both had as their primary mission the maintenance of local security and the conduct of operation against enemy local forces.

The US Military Assistance Command performed a study in 1964 which addressed RVNAF force levels. The study proposed the following two alternatives:

- Modest Increases
  - 30,000-man increase in regular forces
  - 35,000-man increase in regional forces (RF)
  - 11,000-man increase in popular forces (PF)
- Substantial Increases
  - 48,000-man increase in regular forces
  - 48,000-man increase for both RF and PF.

In January 1965, the modest increase was approved, with some minor modification, and force levels were fixed at 275,000 for regulars, 137,000 for the RF and 185,000 for the PF.<sup>8/</sup> These levels were increased to the higher alternative only four months later when both the US and RVNAF leaders realized that the military situation was not improving. As a result, the regular force ceiling was set at over 290,000-men. Thereafter, the planning and study of the RVNAF force structure became a continuous joint US-RVNAF activity. The major constraints involved a US willingness to underwrite RVNAF force increases (from one fiscal year to the next) and the maximum strength that the Vietnamese manpower base could maintain and support. Notwithstanding these and other limiting factors, the force levels were increased. Table 5-1 illustrates the dramatic increases attained by the RVNAF from 1967 through to the cease-fire in January 1973.

To handle effectively the command and control of the expanded RVNAF, the force structure was reorganized in 1972 along the lines depicted in Figure 5-2.

TABLE 5-1. REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM ARMED FORCES STRENGTH<sup>a</sup>

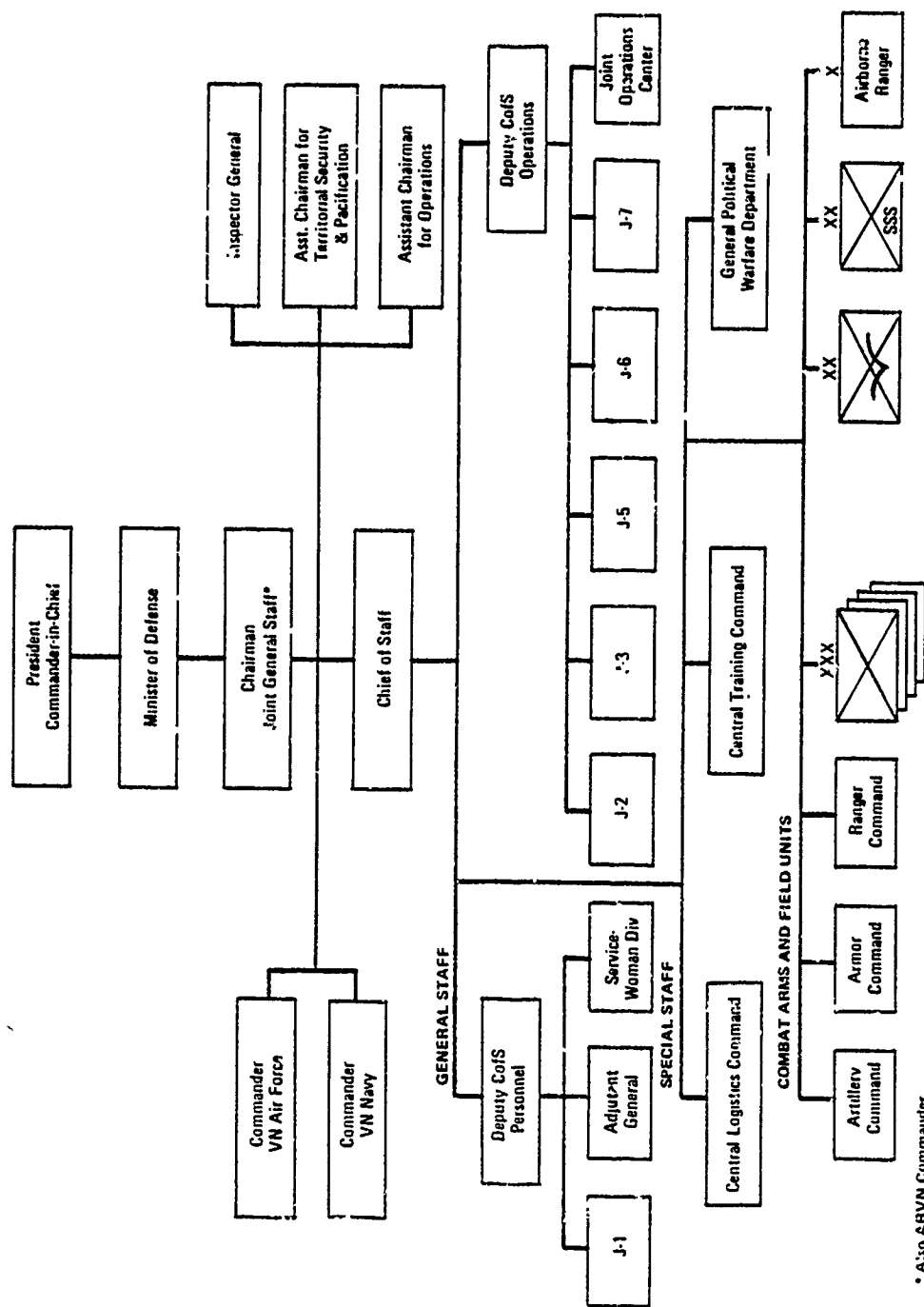
	ARMY	AIR FORCE	NAVY	MARINE CORPS	TOTAL REGULAR	REGIONAL FORCES	POPULAR FORCES	TOTAL TERRITORIAL	GRAND TOTAL
1954-1955	170,000	3,500	2,200	1,500	177,200	54,000 <sup>b</sup>	48,000 <sup>b</sup>	102,000	279,200
1959-1960	136,000 <sup>c</sup>	4,500	4,300	2,000	146,000	49,000 <sup>c</sup>	48,000	97,000	243,000
1964	220,000	11,000	12,000	7,000	250,000	96,000	168,000	264,000	514,000
1967	303,000	16,000	16,000	8,000	343,000	151,000	149,000 <sup>c</sup>	300,000	643,000
1968	380,000	19,000	19,000	9,000	427,000	220,000	173,000	393,000	820,000
1969	416,000	36,000	30,000	11,000	493,000	190,000	214,000	404,000	897,000
1970	416,000	46,000	40,000	13,000	515,000	207,000	246,000	453,000	968,000
1971-1972	410,000 <sup>c</sup>	50,000	42,000	14,000	516,000	284,000	248,000	532,000	1,048,000

SOURCE: James L. Collins, Jr. The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972, p. 151

<sup>a</sup> ALL FIGURES ARE APPROXIMATE ONLY.

<sup>b</sup> CIVIL GUARD (LATER REGIONAL FORCES) AND SELF-DEFENSE CORPS (LATER POPULAR FORCES) WERE OFFICIALLY AUTHORIZED ONLY IN 1956.

<sup>c</sup> DECLINE DUE TO INCREASED DESERTIONS AND RECRUITING SHORTFALLS.



SOURCE: Cao Van Vien et al., The U.S. Adviser, p. 36

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Figure 5-2. Organization, Joint General Staff and Armed Forces Structure



2. The Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF)

The VNAF was created in 1951 as an adjunct to French Air Force elements operating in Vietnam. VNAF development was slow in the army-dominated RVNAF structure until June 1965, when Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, who was then Commander of the Air Force, came to power in the government at the head of a small group of military officers. He held several key positions in the GVN (i.e., Prime Minister and Vice President) and exercised great influence over and in behalf of the VNAF.

The mission of the VNAF was to provide close air support, liaison, interdiction, air escort, air transport, medical evacuation, and aerial reconnaissance in direct support of the ARVN; to provide air surveillance of South Vietnam borders and coastlines; and to conduct special air operations such as search and rescue, unconventional warfare, psychological operations and military civic action programs. The RVNAF also performed strike sorties and provided air support to other RVNAF units. Almost all training of pilots and maintenance crews as well as logistical support was provided by the US. Throughout the war, the South Vietnamese air space was effectively controlled by the US military air arms and the VNAF.

The VNAF headquarters was located in Saigon with five composite wings, one each at DaNang, Nha Trang, Binh Thuy, Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut airfields. From their meager beginnings, the VNAF expanded to an organization of about 50,000 personnel and over 2,000 aircraft, including jets, propeller-driven aircraft and helicopters by 1974. Aircraft by type included A-1 fighter-bombers; F-5 and A-37 fighters; C-130, C-123, C-119 and C-47 transports; UH-1, AH-1G, and CH-34C helicopters; and, other miscellaneous and liaison aircraft.<sup>9/</sup>

When the US withdrew its helicopter and air support of RVNAF forces, the VNAF found itself hard pressed to provide their people with the same level of air support. Limited maintenance capabilities and supply shortages caused aircraft availability to drop sharply. Those factors, coupled with pilot shortages, munitions and fuel shortages, and improved

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enemy anti-aircraft capabilities, greatly reduced the VNAF's effectiveness during the last months of the war.

### 3. The Vietnamese Navy (VNN)

The VNN, which was created on March 1952, grew under US tutelage to become one of the largest naval forces in Asia. It was charged with patrol of the coast, patrol of inland waterways, and support of ground forces in maintaining internal security.

The first Vietnamese naval unit was activated on 10 April 1953. It was patterned after the French naval assault divisions (dinassauts) and consisted of three LCMs and two LCVPs.<sup>10/</sup> By January 1956, the Vietnamese organized a Sea Force and established five Sea Zones extending from the 17th parallel to the Cambodian border. Ships and craft of the Sea Force were organized into eight flotillas to control coastal traffic or to guard the naval territory. The River Force now contained six dinassauts.<sup>11/</sup> A Marine Force was also included in the Navy (see following section), largely as a result of French insistence that infantry elements should be part of a river force and should normally operate with boat units.<sup>12/</sup>

Later, the country was divided into four naval zones that corresponded approximately with the four ARVN corps tactical zones. Naval Forces assigned were directly under the operational control of the naval zone commander. The shore establishment, in addition to naval headquarters, included the four naval zone commands, two riverine commands, and the commands of the Rung Sat Special Zone, the Capital Military District and other supply, administrative, communications and repair facilities.

By 1974, the VNN had attained a personnel strength of over 42,000 men. Its vessel inventory exceeded 1,500 craft, which included amphibious warfare ships, amphibious warfare craft, minor surface combatant vessels, mine-warfare ships, auxiliary ships, motorized junks, service miscellaneous craft, and monitors.<sup>13/</sup>

Several factors affected the VNN's capabilities to sustain satisfactorily their operations against the enemy in 1974 and 1975. Their river force boats were deteriorating because of extensive riverine operations; shore and mobile base facilities were inadequate; they had an insufficient

number of trained and qualified operational and maintenance personnel; and munitions and fuel were in short supply. They were almost totally dependent on the US for technical, training and logistic support.14/

4. The Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC)

The VNMC, created by decree on 1 October 1954, was formed with men who had served in the French commando forces in Indochina. Its headquarters was established in Saigon, near the VNN headquarters.

After expanding to division size, the missions of the VNMC were to act as a part of the general reserve (which included the ARVN's Airborne Division), to conduct amphibious and land operations as directed, to assist in the maintenance of internal security, and to provide physical security to naval installations.

The VNMC's personnel strength grew to about 14,000 by 1974. Initially, it was organized as a light infantry division and later as a standard infantry division. All of the VNMC's officers and men were volunteers. They were highly motivated and well disciplined, and morale was generally excellent although they, too, were plagued with a high desertion rate. The principal deficiency of the VNMC throughout the conflict was a lack of a continuous formal unit training program for both infantry and supporting units. That deficiency existed primarily because of the near-continuous operational deployments of the VNMC to all combat tactical zones of the country in response to varying critical situations, both military and political, in the last years of the war. The VNMC Commandant also acted as the Division Commander, a situation which created problems when the Marine Division was deployed. By virtue of his high rank (Lieutenant General) the VNMC commander would often "out-rank" the Corps commander that his unit was assigned to support. Friction because of this rank disparity caused problems during Lam Son 719 operations. (See Chapter 4, Volume VI.)

5. Critical Issues

- Perhaps the most salient critical issue to be derived from the formation of the Vietnamese Armed Forces is that the years of French Colonial rule in Vietnam had a negative effect on the subsequent development and combat effectiveness of the armed forces

(namely the Army) of South Vietnam. For all practical purposes, there was no truly independent RVNAF until after the Geneva Accords of 1954; a relatively short period ensued between then and the rapid acceleration of communist insurgency in the early '60's. As previously discussed, the French ruled Vietnam in the classic mode of colonial master; they suppressed all forms of emergent native leadership. Statistics (Table 5-2 below) on the ethnic composition of the defending garrison at Dien Bien Phu reveals the nature of that suppression.

TABLE 5-2. GARRISON OF DIEN BIEN PHU 15/

	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>NCO'S</u>	<u>EM'S</u>	<u>TOTALS</u>
VIETNAMESE	11	270	5,119	5,480
TOTAL	393	1,666	13,026	15,105
% OF TOTAL WHO WERE VIETNAMESE	2.8	16.2	39.2	36.2

Thus, the Vietnamese comprised more than a third of the fighting forces (and nearly 40% of the enlisted troops); but among the leaders, they provided one-sixth of the non-commissioned officers and less than 3% of the officers. The paucity of Vietnamese officers at Dien Bien Phu reflected the general condition of the National Army: as of 1953, there were 2,600 native officers, of whom only a handful held grades above major, compared to 7,000 French officers in a force of 150,000 Vietnamese troops.

The unexpected post-World War II anti-French insurgency forced France reluctantly to recognize an indigenous Vietnamese political state and military force within the concept of the "French Union." Unfortunately for the survival potential for a non-communist Vietnamese state, there was a dearth of both political and military leaders who could immediately assume responsibilities. To a great extent, the above-cited French colonial policy is to blame.

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- Another issue concerns the lack of indigenous political and military preparedness. During the period that Vietnam was under Japanese occupation during World War II, it was under Vichy French control. Under those circumstances the French Colonial administration, both civil and military, was enjoined by the Vichy government from undertaking any forms of resistance against the occupying forces in accordance with the 1940 agreement with the Japanese government. Hence, the only meaningful anti-Japanese military resistance movement to emerge was fomented under communist leadership not having allegiance to Vichy France (nor for that matter, to the "Free" French government in London). With the war's end, the only viable Vietnamese force was the communist-dominated Viet Minh.
- Closely related to the above issue is that the communist-led insurgents could be perceived domestically and externally as loyal patriots and nationalists fighting for the "liberation" of Vietnam from all foreign imperialistic colonizers, whereas the anti-communists were not so perceived. Because of their affiliation with the long-discredited French, many saw them as "lackeys" of the French, and as actually assisting the French in their efforts to reimpose colonial rule. This was propaganda the communists were to employ successfully throughout the war (albeit, "French colonial rule" was later changed to "American imperialism").

### 6. Implications for US Policies

For the foreseeable future, a significant portion of US diplomatic and military foreign assistance and policies will continue to be directed towards areas of political and economic instability. It is also likely that much of the insurgent activity will be directed towards the overthrow of the existing government (comparatively conservative in nature and to varying degrees, pro-US). The insurgent leadership in the classical tradition of these movements will claim the government in power as "fascist" and "pro-American imperialists" and themselves as the "liberators"

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against this "oppression." This message, though of course simplistic and often not in accordance with the actual state of things, has great appeal for the economically underprivileged, the political outsiders, and the intellectual and educated dissidents.

Given this rather uncomplicated model, it becomes evident that no matter how noble and altruistic US efforts to assist a beleaguered regime are, the US could be perceived by a majority of the domestic population, and indeed by foreign powers, as an interloper motivated either to preserve or advance its own various interests.

The United States can expect the dissidents to have built a well-developed infrastructure with unsophisticated, yet effective command and control, and even intelligence collection networks. These covert networks generally will have been established well in advance of overt acts of insurrection and guerrilla actions. Furthermore, the networks will be in the hands of externally-trained "professionals," well trained in the art of subversion.

Because of the defensive posture of most regimes in power in these circumstances, some anti-insurgent measures will actually result in inhumane acts which are propagandized as such, and which will raise public support for the dissidents. In most cases, this tactic has proved successful and has embarrassed both the ruling authorities and its US supporters.

Finally, though in the case of Vietnam there was the negative "legacy" of the French colonial rule, the same cannot be said of future antigovernment subversions and insurrectionary activities. Most potentially unstable regimes have been free of colonial rule for some time and have had at least a generation of indigenous leadership. Thus, the inhibiting effect of colonial rule on leadership has ceased to be a factor to be reckoned with in most countries. Instead, the United States is likely to be confronted with regimes in trouble because of their own incompetence or because of economic or other problems beyond their control. As such, the leadership may be far less receptive to US advice and remedial action than the newly emergent South Vietnamese leadership was.

The discussion above implies, in sum, that the United States may indeed find itself on some occasions in a "no win" situation with respect to future contingencies of insurgency. If it does elect to come to the assistance of a regime in trouble with indigenous and externally inspired insurgency, it can expect to receive approbation and censure from all quarters, ranging from mere rhetoric to active military countermeasures abroad and popular and congressional discord at home. If it does nothing it could be perceived as not having the will or the fortitude to support a regime even though it would be to its national interest to do so.

7. Significant Insights

- Among the most significant insights to be derived from the long French colonial rule in Vietnam and its effect on the South Vietnamese military establishment is its overly pervasive influence and tenure. In essence, the French domination very directly inhibited both self and organizational development, resulting in a military leadership ill-prepared to assume the responsibilities of independence thrust upon them. Whatever tutelage the French were able to provide the indigenous Vietnamese, it was insufficient to meet the administrative and operational requirements imposed by the communist threat. Perhaps if more time were available under conditions of peace and political stability, a native leadership would have emerged, free of the inhibiting effects of French influence. As a result, Vietnamese leaders seemed to lack confidence and later submitted to American domination. Among the most important benefits that could have resulted from an indigenously derived military leadership is the perception of a national, i.e., patriotic defense establishment serving Vietnamese interests. Instead, the South Vietnamese armed forces were never accepted as being free of French and later American domination. This deficiency was to prove decisive in losing popular support and confidence and provided the Viet Minh (later the Viet Cong) with a strong anti-colonialist (or anti-imperialist) rallying point for their successful insurgency movement.

- The French relationship with the Japanese occupiers during World War II and its immediate aftermath had significant impact on later developments in the South. First, the returning French were regarded as re-occupiers bent on re-establishing their former colonial empire; and second, no anti-communist military infrastructure or readily available resource base existed from which an effective indigenous anti-communist military force could be constructed. This prevailing condition made the continuing dependent association between the anti-communist leadership and the unacceptable French inevitable. It is necessary, however, to consider the immediate onset of communist insurgency after the war in the context of the above discussion of significant insights.

In retrospect, it seems reasonable to fault the French for reimposing their colonial rule on people who were seeking political independence. Also it seems reasonable to fault the Vietnamese leadership, particularly Bao Dai and his immediate successors, for so readily accepting this relationship with their French masters. It is equally reasonable, then, to ask the question, what were the alternatives for each? With the luxury that hindsight permits, it may be said that the alternatives for both French and anti-communist Vietnamese leaders were acceptable to them. However, the failure of both parties to recognize that the post-World War II world would be different as evinced by new social, economic, political, and national movements, is an indictment of their lack of foresight and comprehension of the new state of things in the emergent post-war era. This ultimately proved fatal to both the French and anti-communist South Vietnamese.

In spite of the importance of territorial security throughout the war, South Vietnamese and US officials never seemed to place enough emphasis on it. Territorial security was almost neglected during the initial stage. From 1955 to 1960, all efforts and resources were devoted to the build-up of anti-invasion capabilities with only token concern about security matters. Valuable time thus was irretrievably lost in the effort to



consolidate territorial security, especially at the infrastructure level, the village and hamlet. Hence, the GVN/US effort became involved in a catch-up situation in territorial security. The development of the RF and PF was never based on any clear-cut, long range concept, and they were not given any priority for equipment and materiel until late 1968 under the Vietnamization program.

### C. LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

#### 1. Introduction

The key element in any organization and endeavor, as proven through history, is leadership. In military organizations having great material and personnel resources backed by a reasonably stable political and economic regime, some deficiencies in leadership can be overcome or endured without catastrophic results. In the case of the South Vietnamese, deficient military leadership, lacking the above-cited resources and political/economic stability, was catastrophic.

The subject of South Vietnamese military leadership both historically and substantively divides into three main phases:

- The French influence
- The South Vietnamese effort at self improvement
- The American influence.

Throughout the course of this narrative these phases will become evident.

#### 2. Historical Perspectives and Analysis

##### a. The French Tutelage Period (1945-1954)

Generally speaking, prior to the Geneva Accords of 1954 virtually all responsibility for military operations and local territorial security was under the control of the French. This situation prevailed despite the existence of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. The Vietnamese General Staff had a functioning, albeit rudimentary, command, control, and communications system. Two major factors were responsible for the French

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finally opting for the "national" solution, i.e., the creation of the Vietnamese Armed Forces: the increasing French military involvement in Algeria in the early 1950's, and the increased involvement in Vietnam, North and South. These increased military efforts placed heavier burdens on French personnel and material and financial resources, thus increasing domestic political discord and crises within and outside of the government.

The Vietnamese Armed Forces once established, though French-controlled and officered at higher levels, nevertheless progressed in unit size from companies to battalions, and eventually to mobile groups or brigades. As this process continued, the French transferred some battalions from the Union Forces to the Vietnamese forces in order to augment them quickly with a readily available seasoned force and cadre.

At this time, many of the Vietnamese who had graduated from the French Military Academies, namely St. Cyr, had excellent military knowledge but lacked the necessary combat experience to assume combat leadership responsibilities. As a result, most of these officers were placed in staff assignments or were relegated to rear area support functions. In contrast, those Vietnamese personnel who rose through the ranks and attended in-country military schools tended to excel in combat but were poor in staff assignments. A third group, those officers and NCOs coming from auxiliary forces (i.e., religious sects) were usually good in combat but lacked technical information and military knowledge.

Even as part of the French Union Forces, many of the Vietnamese units suffered from similar disparity regarding combat capability; they either were not employed efficiently commensurate with their overall capabilities, or were not employed effectively for the combat environment where they were deployed. In general, as might be expected, the colonial airborne and commando units fought well, whereas the infantry units performance was fair to average, while the auxiliary/sectarian units fought poorly in combat with a few exceptional units performing well.

In assessing the combat performance of Vietnamese units during the early phase of their counter-insurgency efforts, Gen. Cao Van Vien notes that, "Vietnamese units seldom respected the lives and property

of the local population, especially in mopping-up operations. Unfortunately this state of affairs was remedied only during the last few years of the war."16/

In this early stage of the formation of the Vietnamese Army, virtually all of the training of both officers and enlisted personnel was by French Union Forces cadre; similarly, training texts and other materials were prepared in France and of course, in the French language. It was not until well after Vietnamese independence that Vietnamese officially replaced French in the Vietnamese Armed Forces. General Vien observes that, "it was obvious that the Vietnamese Armed Force was the offspring of the French Union Forces and faithfully mirrored it, and whose flaws and weaknesses it innerited."17/

For example, the basic military manual used in Vietnamese units and military schools was the Manuel de Grade (Manual for Small Unit Commanders) by Larauzelles. This manual contained all the basic information considered necessary for small unit operations. Its serious drawback is that it reflected French military philosophy. The salient aspect of French military philosophy as reflected in the manual was that discipline of the troops and the authority of the commander was the most important element for successful combat operations. In essence, this attitude reflected the prevailing concept that all subordinates were enjoined to execute all orders issued by a superior rank. As a result, Vietnamese officers for a considerable period were imbued with this French concept of leadership which they accepted as articles of faith for guidance. During this period Vietnamese officers working under the tutelage of French cadres were also very heavily influenced by the way these cadres exercised command and leadership.

The promotions, advancements and assignments of Vietnamese officers were also influenced by their relationship with the French overseers. Even though combat and staff duty performance was recognized, loyalty to the French cause was an additionally significant fact - a legacy to be inherited by future Vietnamese political leaders seeking the loyalty and support of the military establishment.

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This relationship between the Vietnamese military force and its French mentors resulted in a lack of confidence in the Vietnamese soldiers from the highest political level in Vietnam. For example the Chief of State, Bao Dai, expressed the opinion that the French would have to continue their tutelage for an indefinite time:

As for me, I have always wished that our nation should have an army of its own. But many people advise me that at the present time we should not develop what we have into a full-fledged army. For it would be detrimental to our nation as long as we cannot provide an ideal for our soldiers to fight for. And as long as these men fight without an ideal, they are apt to desert their ranks in mass and go over to the other side. Tell me, how can we motivate and instill a combat spirit in our soldiers as long as we fail to inspire confidence among our people? We don't have enough command cadres. The army is said to be ours but it is commanded by French officers and employed by the French High Command. If we say that this is our army, then we tacitly admit its mercenary character and how can a mercenary army have any ideal or the support of the population?18/

Thus, from the beginning there was a lack of evolving indigenous Vietnamese leadership which could assure greater responsibility for internal security and confronting the threat from the North. It was not until 1954 that most of the South Vietnamese units were under the command of their own native officers, although the national leadership was still largely in the hands of the French; they continued to make all of the decisions concerning the conduct of the war and the operations pertaining to it. It was only after the Geneva Accords of 1954, when Ngo Dinh Diem became Prime Minister, that Vietnam truly became independent politically with its own national army.

It may be said of this period between the end of World War II and the Geneva Accords of 1954 that the Vietnamese units may at best have had unit commanders but seriously lacked Vietnamese military leaders. The evolution of an indigenous military leadership would have to come in the next phase of the Vietnamese war.

b. Leadership and Training During the Diem Regime (1954-1963)

With the independence and establishment of the Army in 1950, the Vietnamese established several types of military schools which included regional and junior officers military academies and the Dalat Interarms Military School. In the beginning, the cadre and instruction staff were all French, but were being gradually replaced by Vietnamese officers.

At this time also, the Armed Forces experienced a great shortage of leadership personnel to assume the responsibilities of staffing the newly independent armed forces. In order to provide a quick remedy for this acute shortage, a large number of Vietnamese officers and NCOs serving in the French Union Forces were detached to the Army. Ultimately, these cadres were integrated into the RVNAF to assume permanent leadership roles.

The deficiencies in leadership potential of the Armed Forces at this time were acute, and one could question the prospects for the survival of the Armed Forces. Leadership shortages existed at all echelons; training was thus accelerated and covered a wide subject area. The Vietnamese government requested assistance from in-country and French schools, both in military and non-military subjects. To supplement this effort, many of the best qualified students were sent to France for further military training.

With the advent of full political and military independence from France in 1955, the RVNAF had already underway a fledgling array of military leadership and training programs. By May 1956, the last French forces departed Vietnam, many to participate in the Algerian war. Thus for the first time in nearly a century, Vietnam was free of its French overlords and preparing itself for national survival, though she was beset by internal political discord and external military threats. During this transition from declining French to increased Vietnamese control of the armed forces, Diem assumed maximum political and military authority. Early in this period, Diem removed General Hinh as Chief of Staff of the Army as a result of policy disagreement, and replaced him with General Le Van Ty.

This period also witnessed Diem's creation of his own political party, the "Personalist Labor Party" (Cam Lao Party). Of importance

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for this discussion is the fact that within a short time the party was able to infiltrate into the RVNAF and subsequently introduced a debilitating politicization process among the leadership. There were several instances of insubordination as lower-ranking military personnel with party connections overruled or intimidated higher ranking non-party members. In time, this eventually ended, but increasingly key higher military personnel achieved high party rank and similarly, high party officials received choice military promotions and assignments. Increasingly, non-party members were excluded from key assignments, particularly with reference to critical commands in the Saigon region.

Very early in this period of leadership development, the Training Relations Instruction Mission was established to develop programs to train recruits, individual and unit replacements, and large units. During this period, recruit training centers were reduced in number and consolidated. Major recruit training centers were established throughout the country as well as a Primary Training Center for officers and NCOs at Quang Trung (Training Center No. 1); an NCO academy was established at Nha Trang, and the Inter-Service Military School for NCOs at Dalat. At Training Center No. 1, leadership courses stressing US Army tactics and techniques to officers and key NCOs were begun in June 1955; these courses lasted three weeks and included basic drill, combat tactics, marksmanship, and basic military sciences as taught in US military schools. Eventually this course was lengthened to six weeks and ultimately each division was given the responsibility of presenting this course to its officers and NCOs. General Cao Van Vien notes that the bearing and appearance of the troops both at headquarters and in the field took on a professional quality.

Also beginning in 1955, selected RVNAF officers began attending the US Army school at Ft. Benning and Ft. Leavenworth for command and leadership courses. Approximately 4,500 RVNA officers and NCOs were sent to US military schools for advanced training.<sup>19/</sup> Much later, in 1966, a Military Academy for further training for career officers was established; this course eventually required four years for completion.

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From their inception, admission of officers and NCOs to the advanced military schools was by academic achievement and examination. Indeed, most of the candidates came from urban centers and generally from the affluent middle and upper classes of the population. This condition was more prevalent in the early days of the republic, but as the education base expanded, a broader candidate resource pool resulted. As was his policy, the Chief of the US MAAG, LTG Samuel Williams, kept President Diem constantly informed of the status of RVNAF units, personnel, equipment and even the performance of various commanders.

Despite the efforts devoted to training and leadership since 1955, the first real test of battle came in January 1963 at the battle of Ap Bac. In this engagement, a group of approximately 300 VC defeated the 7th division, causing over 400 casualties and great loss of equipment. The division was caught by surprise and ill-prepared to fight, due in the main to poor leadership. Its commander was a political appointee and loyal to Diem's powerful Can Lao Party.20/

Thus the last year of the Diem regime, which invested great effort and resources into developing leadership and professional military operational standards, witnessed a humiliating defeat of an important unit vital to the defense of the region south of Saigon, by a battalion of insurgents who were excellently led and possessed of the requisite military intelligence and spirit necessary to overcome the materially superior RVNAF forces.

### c. Leadership During the Post-Diem Period (1963-1967)

The impact of the military coup against the Diem regime had profound effects on the subsequent direction and leadership of the RVNAF. The most obvious impact discernible was the sudden awareness among senior and key officers of their political power and their ability to bring down an unacceptable government and its leadership. This was evident in the case of Diem and was to prove true in the succeeding coups and counter-coups of the next two years. Indeed, this period (1963-1965) could be considered as South Vietnam's "Times of Trouble," in which to a large extent the politicizing factors responsible for the eventual collapse were first manifested.

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Immediately after the Diem coup, those officers who were instrumental in this action were promoted by as much as three grades, resulting in many instances in over-officered and top-heavy organizations and command structures. Despite other criticisms merited by the Diem government, that government's officer selection methods and established criteria for promotional and key assignments may be considered "benign" when compared to these processes immediately after the coup.

The politicization of the RVNAF continued unabated for the remainder of 1963 and through 1964 to the accession of power by Thieu and Ky in 1965. Throughout the military establishment, the leadership divided itself into small political power centers dominated by one or more of the latest junta or coup members. These centers tended to pick up new members and often shifted loyalties to support those factions deemed as potential "winners" in future coups.

As General Westmoreland points out, there was progress during 1963 in the development of RVNAF and indeed, there was an "air of optimism".<sup>21/</sup> But the events culminating in the overthrow of President Diem were to create a situation of uncertainty with a lack of direction which would begin a process of military deterioration. General Westmoreland further observes that the frequent political changes in the upper echelons resulted in changes in the military leadership as political favorites were assigned key jobs.

With the rapid change in political and military leadership occurred a rapid decline in RVNAF combat and other operational effectiveness. There is little doubt that the communists were aware of the prevailing deteriorating conditions and in response stepped up their activities from harassments to pitched battles.

The years 1965 to 1967 saw the burden of the war shift to the United States and its allies. Essentially the RVNAF was given the missions of supporting the pacification program by suppressing the guerrillas in the lowlands and giving military and technical support to rural development. In contrast, the US and its allies (e.g., South Korea and Australia) were assigned missions aimed at destroying the communist main attack forces and providing security for US logistical support facilities.



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In 1966 a program entitled "New Horizons" was initiated to provide guidance to unit commanders for implementing the improvement of the living standards of the serviceman. This program included the provisioning of daily rations, improvements in creature comforts and institution of a less restrictive leave policy.

Commencing in late 1955, the RVNAF began its rapid expansion, thus creating the need for more experienced combat leaders. This need became critical in a very short time. The greatest need was for cadre at the small unit level. The usual method was to provide a nucleus of cadre taken from other units and enhanced with newly trained NCOs and new and experienced officer replacements. Even though this procedure proved effective for rapidly increasing the number of trained cadres, it nevertheless reduced the combat effectiveness of those units losing the combat-experienced personnel.

Under the direction of Gen. Cao Van Vien, the RVNAF Joint General Staff (JGS) was acutely aware of the need for improving leadership at the small unit level. One attempt at quick remedy was the publication of a handbook for small unit commanders. That handbook contained basic guidance regarding the qualities of leadership; relationships with subordinates; loyalty to the fellow unit members, the unit, and the nation; requisites for new commanders; instructions for assuming new commands; leadership in combat operations; exercising authority; and techniques for assessing and evaluating subordinates and unit performance.

In addition to attempts to improve basic leadership at small unit levels, the JGS endeavored to improve personnel administration, promotion policies and procedures for both officers and NCOs. Emphasis was placed on the proper use of efficiency reports based on duty performance and education. As a result of this effort a significantly greater number of key assignments and promotions were made on a basis of performance rather than political or personal bias.

The expansion of the RVNAF during the period after Diem's fall was characterized by increased resistance to the draft and higher desertion rates. That state of affairs was largely a result of the poor

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leadership and the concomitant lack of morale and dedication to national survival. This became another important reason for the accelerating demands for increasing leadership and command resources in the RVNAF as recognized both by the Vietnamese and US advisors.

The above-cited programs were thus further enhanced by greater concentration of command and leadership courses in the curriculum of military schools and training centers during 1966. This program was designed to lay a solid foundation for the formation of good leadership qualities for long-term career requirements for both officers and NCOs. The High Command now finally realized this was the highest priority commitment in order to prosecute the war successfully.

By 1967 beneficial results of those leadership programs were in evidence. General Westmoreland notes that the lower desertion rate was due primarily to leadership development programs. Furthermore, Westmoreland cites the fact that the US advisors attempted to indoctrinate RVNAF commanders in their responsibilities for the health, welfare, and morale of their troops. All this was programmed to strengthen the chain of command from top down by enhancing the entire scope of leadership in all its ramifications.<sup>22/</sup>

In 1967 extensive improvement and expansion of existing education and training facilities was undertaken. In many cases curricula were significantly improved and reorganized. For example, the Command and Staff College began accepting only candidates with good service records and potential for leadership rather than being a dumping ground for undesirables.<sup>23/</sup> Many of the instructors were graduates of the US Command and General Staff College and thus reflected US military thinking and practices.

In an effort to broaden the scope of subject matter in its training program, the JGS created a General Political Warfare Department and a Political Warfare School with a two-year curriculum at Dalat in 1966. Instructors and political advisors were brought in from Taiwan to augment the Vietnamese faculty.

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Thus by 1968 the entire training base of the RVNAF was expanded, reorganized and modernized to meet most effectively the increasing communist threat and upgrade the overall quality and operations of the RVNAF.

In sum, this period may be considered as both critical and transitional. It was critical in that the RVNAF after the Diem coup was rapidly deteriorating. Extraordinary actions were needed immediately to remedy the chronic debilities of politicization, lack of effective leadership, and lack of trained and experienced personnel in command roles. This period was transitional in that it marked the beginning of overt warfare by main-force units from the North, the insurgency war thus passing out of the hands of the VC to direct control by Hanoi. In response to this change, the burden of the anticommunist war effort passed from the RVNAF to the United States and its allies. Within this period of relative quiescence, the RVNAF endeavored to upgrade its training and leadership programs. The fruit of this effort was soon to be tested in 1968 during Tet and the ensuing confrontations in which national survival would be at stake.

### d. The Thieu Regime (1967-1975)

The years of the Thieu presidency were the most fateful years of South Vietnam's brief independence. This period included three great communist offensives: Tet, January 1968; Easter, 1972; and the Final Offensives, April, 1975. During the Tet and Easter Offensives, the RVNAF absorbed the best that the communists could employ against them and ultimately defeated the attacking forces; they did not, of course, succeed against the communists in the final offensive of 1975. Indeed, in the two successful efforts against the communist onslaughts, these attacks placed overwhelming force and stress on every RVNAF resource, but its leadership prevailed and with substantial US help, achieved the subsequent victories.

The RVNAF modernization and improvement program commencing in 1968 proceeded at an accelerated pace. General Westmoreland notes that a joint RVNAF JGS and USMACV committee was established to facilitate coordination between the US and South Vietnamese military establishments and to monitor the progress of the improvement programs.24/

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This period marked the great and rapid increase in the RVNAF. The demands on leadership at all echelons kept pace with the RVNAF expansion. Accordingly, the training base was expanded to meet these growing needs. The training base at this point in the Vietnamization process in the RVNAF consisted of 26 military schools, conducting 326 courses, and attended by as many as 34,000 students at one time. In addition there were 22 training centers attended by 65,000 to 100,000 recruits. These centers featured training for infantry, rangers, and territorial forces.

Command and leadership was a salient feature in these training programs; such basic tactics as night operations, marksmanship, ambush and patrol operations were fundamental to these training programs. During this period, instructors were increasingly brought in from combat units, part of a procedure in which instructors regularly rotated from combat to training assignments.

In addition to the above discussed accelerated training programs, the US Army introduced the "buddy system" in 1966. This scheme involved the pairing off of Vietnamese and US units in a completely integrated manner. General Westmoreland cites "Operation Fairfax" as one of the most ambitious and indeed successful operations of this type. In this operation, the US 1st, 4th and 25th Divisions and subsequently the 199th Light Infantry Brigade teamed with the ARVN 5th Ranger Group to conduct highly successful limited operations in the Saigon area.<sup>25/</sup> This program was later to be replaced by a US Army - ARVN joint operations program, felt to be more effective for a wider scope of operations than the operationally limited "buddy system."

After 1970, the RVN Air Force and Navy developed very rapidly, thus placing increased demands on technical and language skills combined with equally demanding capabilities in sophisticated command and control techniques. The RVN Air Force established, for example, a three-year training program for almost 3,400 pilots. The US would bear the major burden of this program at first but gradually, as Vietnamese proficiency and the number of trained pilots increased, the burden would shift to the RVN Air Force.

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It is difficult to pinpoint specific results of the RVNAF training programs since there are numerous examples of good and poor performance. General Cao Van Vi describes the leadership and unit performance in several battles. The RVNAF operations in Cambodia in May 1970 by III Corps were noted for the initiative, leadership and command exercised by both LTG Do Cao Tri and the performance of his forces at all echelons.26/

Later IV Corps joined III Corps supported by the US 23rd Artillery Group in an example of well planned, coordinated, and executed operation in the "Parrot's Beak" region of Cambodia. Unfortunately, LTG Do Cao Tri and IV Corps commander MG Nguyen Viet Thanh, both outstanding examples of RVNAF leadership, were killed within a year, an irreparable loss from which the RVNAF was never to recover.

The ultimate disaster to strike South Vietnam and which contributed directly to its eventual loss of the war was the failure of command and leadership at the highest level of II Corps. The loss of II Corps Forces precipitated the cascade of events leading to the final military collapse of the RVNAF.

The decision to deploy the II Corps from the Pleiku-Kontum area to the coast in order to recapture Ban Me Thuot was put into motion without the requisite accurate intelligence information of enemy force deployments. The ten-day deployment of II Corps Units to the coast resulted in unacceptably high casualty rates, which could neither be replaced nor sustained.27/

General Cao Van Vien states that Col. Le Khac Ly, II Corps, Chief of Staff admitted "he was totally in the dark" with respect to the II Corps commander's (MG Pham Van Phu) withdrawal plans.28/ There was also failure of the Corps commander to notify and coordinate with the local regional force commands and the province chiefs of the planned withdrawals. This failure of coordination resulted in the unavailability of regional forces to provide intelligence, road security and protection for the flanks of the withdrawing Corps elements.

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Finally, there was failure at all echelons to inform the troops of the nature of the withdrawal operation and what would be expected of them. This failure, again, was one of leadership from the corps command level. The lack of communication and the concomitant failure to exercise effective command resulted in serious breaches in discipline, lack of motivation and control of unit actions.

All of these failures produced the strategic disaster of at least 75% destruction of II Corps combat strength. The original objective to retake Ban Me Thuot was not realized; and the Central Highlands were lost.

### 3. Critical Issues

The primary issue which emerges from the analysis of leadership and training is that despite the massive efforts of the South Vietnamese government to upgrade the quality of training and increase the number of trained personnel, it ultimately failed in its most decisive test. Even though many thousands of enlisted and officer personnel were given intensive leadership training, perhaps the ultimate causes of failure can be found in the fact that those achieving the highest rank and responsibilities were those most inadequately prepared to handle the great demands of leadership and command. The failure of II Corps Commander General Phu to apply the most fundamental principles of command during the March 1975 withdrawal operations is of course the prime example. That this general could have achieved such high rank and command responsibility has to be questioned.

Indeed, a secondary issue, closely related to the above, deals with the fact that there was a critically short supply of qualified high ranking commanders. The loss of two highly competent corps commanders in 1971 (Generals Do Cao Tri and Nguyen Viet Thanh) was to be another significant factor in the final collapse of the ARVN. After the destruction of II Corps in March 1975, the commanders of III and IV Corps were not able to organize effective resistance to stem the communist drive on Saigon. One could only speculate that if Generals Tri and Thanh had been in command, perhaps there would have been far different results.

Attendant to the problems of leadership were those of promotion and grade/responsibility. During the Diem era and especially in the post-Diem turmoil, 1963-1965, there was a large number of high ranking officers in excess of authorized positions due to the promotion "inflation" of participants in the coup against Diem. With the subsequent expansion of the RVNAF, the shortage of experienced and trained leaders and commanders became even more acute. Consequently, the actual grade structure in most units in the RVNAF was below the authorized strength, despite the intensive US and South Vietnamese efforts to remedy the deficiency. General Collins points out that in 1969, for example, 47% of the infantry battalion commanders were two grades below the authorized grade level.<sup>29/</sup> This state of affairs resulted in many junior officers and even officer candidates assuming responsibilities exceeding their capabilities, training or experience. The critical issue herein is that although over 2,500 officers were promoted to senior positions, the rapid expansion of the RVNAF far outpaced the ability of the RVNAF to provide the required officer staffings.

A British Military Attache who served in Saigon from 1959 to 1961 described another manpower problem. He observed that the Vietnamese Army's main difficulty was that it had to find many good officers for civil government posts. Most provincial governors (circa 1962) were soldiers.<sup>30/</sup>

#### 4. Implications for Future US Policies

The United States played a dominant role in the RVNAF efforts to improve and expand its command and leadership resources. The major effort of the US endeavor was to provide leadership instruction to Vietnamese personnel for immediate operational application and for providing cadre for Vietnamese military schools and training centers. This effort took place both in country and in various US military training facilities, notably the Command and General Staff College and the Infantry School. Secondly, the United States MAAG and MACV undertook extensive development of military schools and advanced training centers in South Vietnam. This effort was in full maturity after 1965, concentrating on the development of the Military Academy at Dalat and the National War College.

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The training of Vietnamese at American military schools was predicated on the necessity to provide the RVNAF rapidly with the trained personnel for immediate command and leadership assignments demanded by the increased tempo of the conflict. However, much of the curricula dealing with combat theory and doctrine was mainly relevant to the organization and operation of US forces in Europe and Korea. The obvious implication here is that even though the Vietnamese students received an excellent indoctrination on theoretical aspects of military operations, it is highly probable that little of this knowledge could be used early in the Vietnamese combat environment.

In addition to the above-cited observations, are the impediments to learning and understanding imposed by language and cultural barriers facing a Vietnamese student at an American military school. The fact that so many of these students successfully completed the required course work is indeed a credit to their loyalty and determination to succeed and the American instructors' perseverance to their mission to instruct and educate. Even though these impediments were for the most part overcome, it will be a current and continuing challenge to the US military establishment to deal successfully with the great array of cultural diversities and differences that these students bring to our military schools and training centers.

The "Vietnamization" of the RVNAF included among other things a concerted effort by MACV to assist the RVNAF in developing and expanding its own military schools and institutions of advanced military learning. For its part, the United States tended to create these institutions "in its own image." For example, the curriculum of the Military Academy at Dalat was expanded to four years and a National War College was created. In the first case, the prime needs of the RVNAF, then engaged in the struggle for the national survival, required quickly trained commanders and leaders at all echelons to replace war losses and at the same time provide for its rapid expansion. Four years of commitment to this type of institution, though of important military and academic value and highly beneficial for military career attainments, was a luxury that could be ill afforded given the impelling course of the war for the RVNAF.



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Similarly, the creation of a National War College in the image of the United States seems hardly appropriate under these same circumstances cited above. Perhaps the leaders of the South Vietnamese military establishment felt that they had reached that point in their evolution towards becoming a dominant military power in the region that they required an institution of advanced military education. Eventually, it could have become an important national asset. But not until victory over its enemies and the reasonable assurance of survival of the state had been achieved would a National War College play a useful role.

These and similar US efforts in assisting the RVNAF development of its own training facilities suggest that the true nature of the course of the war and the real needs of the RVNAF to meet its combat requirements were misjudged. This is not to question the motives and intentions of MACV, but rather, to suggest that it may have miscast the requisite leadership training priorities necessary for the RVNAF to meet the increasing threat posed by VC and North Vietnamese forces.

Finally, as General Collins notes, 31/ in too many instances US advisors were more interested in establishing "rapport" with their Vietnamese counterparts than in pursuing the stated mission of advancing the counterpart leadership qualities. Further, General Collins comments that too often the advisors did not take a firm stand on key issues nor did they recommend the dismissal of unsatisfactory commanders.

The implications drawn from General Collins' observations are that many US advisors were not sufficiently assured that failures of counterparts to perform effectively would not reflect on the advisor's capability. The critical requirement was that combat leadership be developed, not just friendships with the counterparts.

### 5. Significant Insights

The RVNAF endeavor to upgrade and increase its command and leadership resources was continually burdened by two conditions. These were: (1) the increasing tempo of the threat and combat activities, and, (2) the resulting accelerated expansion of the armed forces. The basic insight gained from this state of affairs is that a newly created nation

with both limited material and human resources, working in a limited time-frame, beset with fighting both internal subversion and external aggression, in all likelihood would be unable to establish long-term, effectively functioning command and leadership capabilities. In addition, the South Vietnam Government suffered from chronic political instability, thus compounding the leadership problem. The inevitable consequence of this inability led to greater dependence on the US for military guidance and leadership.

The United States entered into this political/military leadership vacuum committed to providing the necessary resources and assisting the RVNAF to solve the problem. As a result of this commitment, the US began assuming the greater share of combat operations with its resulting debilitating effects on the RVNAF.

With the rapid influx of US combat personnel, the conduct of the war took on a US flavor resulting in US doctrine, objectives and management of war operations. In such circumstances, the United States became intimately involved in the domestic, political and economic aspects of South Vietnam with its myriad of problems and issues.

Another insight gained from the US role in enhancing RVNAF leadership is that the gains achieved were at best short term, not able to withstand the long-term threat imposed by the enemy. Thus, in 1972, when the United States was completing its military phase-out, the outward appearance of RVNAF's capability at command and leadership was deceptive. Although the RVNAF were successful at Tet 1968 and Easter 1972, with strong US support, the weaknesses of RVNAF command and leadership had been exhibited in the 1971 Lamson offensive against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. The real test was to come in March 1975.

Given the domestic political situation in the United States in 1972, which will be discussed in subsequent volumes, there may not have been any other choice but to pull out. However, an assessment of the then-current literature and reports did not indicate that the command and leadership fabric of the RVNAF was so fragile that it could be destroyed with virtual ease. This of course, is what occurred in March 1975.

D. EFFICIENCY AND RELIABILITY

The development, organization, leadership and training of the RVNAF, from its creation under French tutelage to US support and influence, were discussed above. This section will explore areas which had significant impact on the efficiency and reliability of the RVNAF. An evaluation and analysis of the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF, however, will be deferred until it can be assessed within the context of the overall war effort in Volume VI, The Conduct of the War.

1. US View of RVNAF Efficiency and Reliability

Emphatic differences of opinion existed throughout the war with respect to the efficiency and reliability of the RVNAF. Following a visit to South Vietnam by an interagency team headed by General Maxwell Taylor in October 1961, a report was published containing an "Evaluation and Conclusions" summary text and a series of memoranda prepared by various members of the Mission. On many points the tone, and sometimes the substance, of the appendices by the lesser members of the Mission were in sharp contrast to the summary paper. For example, the summary text reported that "the South Vietnamese regulars are of better quality than the Viet Cong guerrillas," while an annex memorandum prepared by a State Department representative contained a comment which depicted the performance of the ARVN as "disappointing," generally characterized by a "lack of aggressiveness" and at most levels "devoid of a sense of urgency." The military annex further described the ARVN as "short of able young trained leaders;" the basic soldier as "poorly trained, inadequately oriented and lacking in desire to close with the enemy;" and, for the most part, "that the troops were unaware of the serious inroads" the VC had made in their country.<sup>32/</sup> Throughout, the summary text persisted in putting the GVN's and ARVN's weaknesses in the best light possible, thereby avoiding anything that might suggest that perhaps the US should consider limiting, rather than increasing, its commitments to SVN. In contrast, a military appendix contemplated more drastic alternatives (i.e., the US ought to move on Southeast Asia in force, a position which was advocated by the JCS at the time).<sup>33/</sup>

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In December 1964, conflicting estimates of the situation in South Vietnam indicated that the bright hopes and predictions of the past were increasingly less than realistic. The Secretary of Defense, following a fact finding visit to Vietnam, wrote a memo for the President which was laden with gloom.<sup>34/</sup> Secretary McNamara labeled the situation as "very disturbing" and that "current trends, unless reversed in 2 to 3 months" would lead to "neutralization at best and more likely to a communist-controlled state." He went on to picture the Minh government as "indecisive and drifting," and RVNAF military operations as "not being effectively directed because the generals were so preoccupied with essentially political affairs."<sup>35/</sup> He also stated that the US Embassy Country Team was "lacking leadership," had been "poorly informed" and had "grave reporting weaknesses."<sup>36/</sup> McNamara's memo contrasted greatly with other, more optimistic, reports at this time such as the one prepared by the Office of the Special Assistant [to the JCS] for Counterinsurgency and Special [Covert.] Activities (SACSA). The SACSA report (which was a retrospective '61-'64 overview) presented nothing less than a glowing account of the steady progress made by the RVNAF across the board and little concerning the improved combat effectiveness of the VC.<sup>37/</sup>

Later, differences between US agencies on the RVNAF continued to outweigh the points of agreement. For example, in 1969, then presidential adviser Henry Kissinger separately asked several government agencies to give him their views on the conduct of the war. His purpose was to lay the foundation for National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) Number 1. As a result the reporting agencies indicated a consensus that as of January 1969, the RVNAF had become larger, better equipped and somewhat more effective; but that it could not then, nor in the foreseeable future, handle both the VC and sizable NVA forces without US combat support.<sup>38/</sup> On other major points there was vivid controversy. The US military community (JCS, CINCPAC & MACV) and the State Department gave much greater weight to RVNAF statistical improvements while OSD and CIA highlighted remaining obstacles, with OSD the most pessimistic. Paradoxically, MACV/CINCPAC/JCS saw the RVNAF as being less capable against the VC alone than did State and CIA.

OSD did not believe the ongoing US-sponsored expansion and reequipment programs were sufficient to make the RVNAF into an effective fighting force because major political and military actions required were not being emphasized by the GVN.<sup>39/</sup> Poor leadership and motivation were factors which OSD claimed were causing the RVNAF's high desertion rates (losing about 1/3 of their ground combat force each year).<sup>40/</sup> The net result of this effort was a Nixon Administration decision to push for Vietnamization and to speed the US troop pull out of Vietnam.

Emphatic differences continued through to the last winter of the war in 1974. Frank Snepp, in his book Decent Interval, makes light of Ambassador Martin's tight control over the flow of information from the US Embassy in Saigon. Reporting from the station reflected the Ambassador's "optimism" regarding security in the South Vietnamese countryside and the capabilities of the RVNAF. When asked about the objectivity of Embassy reporting by a visiting group of Congressmen in 1974, he was said to have alluded to his proven integrity in forty years of government service as proof of the veracity of the reporting from Saigon.<sup>41/</sup> On the question of the security of the countryside, he was said to have denied to the congressmen that there had been any significant slippage at all; and when asked about NVA intentions, Snepp quotes him as saying:

All I can say is I wish the North Vietnamese would mount a major offensive in the next month or so. No doubt the ARVN would give ground at first; they always do. But after that they would surely go on to defeat the NVA decisively, as they did in 1972.<sup>42/</sup>

Besides Snepp, there were other members of the Country Team who did not share the Ambassador's optimistic views. Among them was the US Army Attache who on July 5, 1974, reported as follows:

There is little evidence to indicate that overall performance of the average soldier has improved over the past, and his actions in battle remain unpredictable. ARVN units have, at times, fought well despite unimaginative tactics and extremely high casualties, and they have also panicked and fled before the enemy. Several factors probably account for this uncertain

performance in battle. The war's long duration with no end in sight despite a so-called cease fire, mediocre leadership at the company level, inadequate pay and fluctuating morale all contribute....The future of ARVN may well be decided in the halls of U.S. Congress or by the faltering economy of the GVN rather than by its own efficiency or that of the enemy. However, there are disquieting signs that ARVN does not fight as well as it needs to. Despite the advantages of overwhelming artillery support and completely unopposed air superiority, ARVN has so far remained unable to eject an enemy force from two of three positions seized north of Saigon in mid-May despite a Presidential directive to do so.43/

Early on, there seemed to be little doubt in the eyes of most key US officials that, though in trouble, the GVN could win their war against the communist insurgents if provided prompt and energetic US military, economic and political assistance, that is, without a US takeover of the war. The Taylor Mission Report in 1961 cast the RVNAF in the best possible light, and avoided any suggestion that the US limit its commitment or face the need to enter the battle with full force at that time. Underlying the report's summary was the notion that graduated measures on the DRV applied with weapons of the US's choosing could reverse any adverse trend in the South. The use of ground combat forces was never ruled out.

Appendices to the 1961 Taylor Report, written by members of the Mission, painted a different picture. There was less optimism about the GVN or RVNAF's chances of success, less optimism about chances of US action--political or military--tipping the balance. The ARVN was portrayed as lacking aggressiveness, devoid of a sense of urgency and short of able leaders. The State Department authors questioned whether the GVN could survive even with US assistance. They concluded it would be a mistake to make an irrevocable US commitment to defeat the communists in South Vietnam. In the end they concluded that foreign military forces could not win the battle at the village level--where inevitably it would be joined; the primary responsibility for saving South Vietnam rested with the GVN and its armed forces. This conclusion gained many belated supporters over the years of US involvement.

The US was continually involved in the process of assessing the RVNAF efficiency and reliability throughout the period of our involvement in SVN. At each key decision point in time, there were contrasting, even divergent, assessments with respect to the RVNAF's capabilities. US decision-makers, therefore, were never presented a consensus view, and often were required to select from those widely varying assessments. Perhaps the tools available for making those assessments were not adequate to the task.

For a comparison of the relative efficiency of the RVNAF vis-a-vis their enemies, see Figure 5-3.

2. Military Decision-Making/RVNAF Command and Control

The line and staff structure of the Vietnamese Armed Forces reflected the organizational influence of its military advisors--first French, and later the Americans. Those influences were important in molding the RVNAF structure; however, the real power had political roots and often undermined the command and control of the Armed Forces. As an example, in his efforts to consolidate his control over the military, strengthen his regime, and compete politically with North Vietnam, President Diem created the Personalist Labor Party (Dong Can Lao) under the party leadership of his younger brother, Nhu.<sup>45/</sup> Adopting communist techniques of organization, the Personalist Labor Party kept its activities underground and never held open meetings or even had an official spokesman. Party members were selected from among those loyal to the regime. They were mostly officials who held key positions in the political, administrative and military organizations of the nation. A senior army officer had this to say about the effects of the party:

In the RVNAF, the incorporation of the Personalist Labor Party system within their ranks initially caused some resentment and friction among officers. There were several cases in which NCOs overruled or infringed on the authority of unit commanders simply because they were high-ranking party members. In time, however, these irregularities ceased to exist and most key military commanders eventually became high-ranking party members.<sup>46/</sup>

	1955-1962	1963-1965	1966-1968	1969-1972	1973-1975
RVNAF	RVNAF BUILDING CONVENTIONAL (DEFENSIVE) FORCE STRUCTURE WITH US ADVICE AND MILITARY AID. (REF: ORDER TO MAN CONVENTIONALLY STRUCTURED DIVISIONS WHICH WERE DEPLOYED IN DEPTH FROM DMZ (KOREAN-TYPE DEFENSE). REAL THREAT WAS INSURGENCY, NOT CONVENTIONAL.	RVNAF WAS BESET WITH LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS & POLITICAL INSTABILITY (ESP. FOLLOWING OVER THROWN OF DIEM). SET BACKS AT THE HANDS OF THE INSURGENTS HAD INCREASED. RVNAF WAS BEING REORGANIZED (WITH US AID) TO COUNTER THE INSURGENCY THREAT (DEFENSIVE POSTURE)	US GROUND COMBAT & AIR FORCES SAVE GVN/RVNAF FROM DEFEAT. RVNAF ON THE OFFENSIVE AND ENJOYING MILITARY SUCCESS. RVNAF RELIANT TO A SECONDARY ROLE AND ASSUMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR REGIONAL SECURITY AND COUNTERINSURGENCY. PRIORITY FOR SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT GOES TO US FORCES.	THE US BEGAN TO REDUCE ITS INVOLVEMENT, WITHDRAW COMBAT FORCES AND INTENSIFY THE VIETNAMIZATION PROGRAM. THE RVNAF CAME OFF BADLY IN LAOS, BUT SHOWED STAMINA & STRENGTH IN DEFEATING THE PAVN EASTER OFFENSIVE IN 1972 (RELYING HEAVILY ON US AIR POWER). POSTURE (TACTICAL & STRATEGIC): DEFENSIVE.	DECREASING US AID AFTER THE 1973 PEACE TREATY, A FEELING THAT THE US HAD ABANDONED THEM, SHORTAGES OF AMMO & EQUIPMENT, INFLATION, CORRUPTION AMONG LEADERS, POOR LEADERSHIP, AND OTHERS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECREASED EFFICIENCY OF THE RVNAF DURING THIS PERIOD. A LACK OF A STRONG MOBILE RESERVE ACCELERATED THE FINAL DEBACLE. THE ARVN BROKE AND RAN UNDER THE FINAL PAVN OFFENSIVE. (RVNAF: 11 COMBAT DIVISIONS PLUS ON DEFENSE).
PAVN	REORGANIZING, REBUILDING, REEQUIPING, & TRAINING MAIN FORCE CONVENTIONAL FORCES WITH PRC & USSR AID. ALSO PAVN ENGAGED IN TRAINING & PROVIDING LOGISTICAL SUPPORT FOR INSURGENCY OPERATIONS OF VC/PLAF (DEFENSIVE).	PREPARED LINES OF COMMO., LOGISTICS BASES AND SANCTUARIES PRIOR TO DEPLOYMENT OF MAIN FORCE ELEMENTS IN THE SOUTH. CONTINUED LOGISTIC SUPPORT & TRAINING OF VC/PLAF REPLACEMENTS. (DEFENSIVE MOVING TO OFFENSE).	MAIN FORCE ELEMENTS BEGIN MAJOR OFFENSIVE (TACTICAL & STRATEGIC). PHASE 3: "GENERAL OFFENSIVE AND UPRISING OF THE MASSES". MAIN FORCE UNITS OCCUPY SOUTH VIETNAMESE TERRITORY AND FIGHT CONVENTIONAL & "SUPER" GUERRILLA BATTLES.	A MAJOR RE-GROUPING AND RE-TRAINING (LEARNING LESSONS FROM '68, '71, AND '72 OPERATIONS). THEY HAD SUFFERED SEVERAL SETBACKS AT HANDS OF RVNAF FORCES (W/O U.S. AIR SUPPORT) TACTICALLY: OFFENSIVE & STRATEGICALLY: OFFENSIVE.	REEQUIPED & REEQUIPED WITH THE LATEST USSR & PRC HARDWARE & SUPPLIES THE PAVN MAIN FORCE ATTACK THRU THE DMZ AND ACROSS THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND EMPLOYED VICTORIOUS IN 55 DAYS. (PAVN: 24 COMBAT DIVISIONS ON OFFENSIVE).
PLAF	CONSOLIDATING & "LAYING THE VC INFRASTRUCTURE" (OR PHASE ONE) AT THE VILLAGE & HAMLET LEVEL. SYSTEMATIC ASSASSINATIONS OF GVN SUPPORTERS AND THE BEGINNING OF ARMED INSURGENCY OPERATIONS AGAINST GVN FORCES.	STEPPED-UP GUERRILLA OPERATIONS. THE TACTICAL INITIATIVE (OFFENSIVE) WAS THEIRS; HOWEVER, STRATEGICALLY, THEY WERE STILL DEFENSIVE, MANY SUCCESSSES BY EMPLOYING SURPRISE & EXPLOITING INITIATIVE. VC/PLAF SUFFERING CASUALTIES, BUT PREVAILING.	THE INSURGENCY PHASE CAME TO A CLOSE WITH "TET '68". VC/PLAF SUFFERED EXTENSIVE AND IRREPARABLE LOSSES IN 1968. SMALL "SUPER" GUERRILLA OPERATIONS TO GAIN MAXIMUM PUBLICITY AND IMPACT ON US PUBLIC OPINION) CONDUCTED THEREAFTER.	THE VC/PLAF WAS JUST ABOUT A NON-ENTITY. THE PHOENIA AND OTHER PROGRAMS HAD DAMAGED THE VC INFRASTRUCTURE & LOSSES FROM TET '68 WERE DIFFICULT TO REPLACE. THEY DID MANAGE SOME "SUPER" GUERRILLA ATTACKS THOUGH.	THE FEW REMAINING VC/PLAF FORCES MARRIED-UP WITH THE PAVN DURING THE FINAL OFFENSIVE & GENERAL POPULAR UPRISING.
RELATIVE EFFICIENCY	DURING THIS CRITICAL PERIOD OF NATION BUILDING AND FORMATION OF THE RVNAF, FROM ALL INDICATIONS AND APPEARANCES, THE RVNAF WAS RELATIVELY MORE EFFICIENT THAN THEIR "ENEMIES". DIEM'S MOVE TO CREATE RANGERS AND REBUILD THE TERRITORIAL FORCES STRUCK HARD AT THE VC/PLAF INSURGENCY IN THE COUNTRY-SIDE.	CLEARLY VC/PLAF WAS MORE EFFICIENT DURING THIS PERIOD OF TRANSITION AND ADJUSTMENT OF THE RVNAF, POLITICAL INSTABILITY, POOR LEADERSHIP & IMPROPER ORGANIZATION & EQUIPMENT (CONVENTIONAL) CAUSED RVNAF'S PROBLEMS. PAVN BEGINNING TO MAKE ITS PRESENCE KNOWN IN SOUTH.	WITH US INTERVENTION THE WAR HAD BEEN TURNED AROUND. THE PAVN HAD BEEN DRIVEN BACK TO THEIR SANCTUARIES IN LAOS & CAMBODIA. VC/PLAF HAD BEEN DESTROYED IN THEIR DEFEAT OF TET 1968. PAVN/US FORCES WERE VERY EFFICIENT DURING THE PERIOD.	DURING THIS PERIOD THE RVNAF RATES THE EDGE OVER THEIR ENEMIES. THE DECIDING EDGE THOUGH USUALLY COULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO EXTENSIVE US AIR SUPPORT.	CLEARLY THE PAVN/PLAF FORCES WERE MORE EFFICIENT DURING THIS PERIOD. THEY CONCLUDED THE WAR WITH FEW CASUALTIES OR LOSSES.

Figure 5-3. Comparison of RVNAF Vs. Their Enemies



From the point of view of the US Military Assistance Command, the command and control of RVNAF defense forces was less than satisfactory under the Diem regime. Diem appointed his Secretary of State for National Defense who in turn supervised the activities of the General Staff Chief and several subdepartments (Figure 5-2). The General Staff Chief, in turn, supervised the Army staff and, through it, the military regions and the field commands. In practice the system was beset by conflicting and duplicating channels of command and communications and by duplicate offices or agencies with overlapping interests. To further complicate matters, various major agencies of the Ministry of National Defense were situated in widely separated areas, which hampered coordination, rapid staff action and decisionmaking. Problems resulting from this command structure were frequent. Often a division commander would receive orders from both his corps commander (who should have been his undisputed boss) and the region commander in whose region the division was operating. Further, branch chiefs (infantry, armor, artillery, etc.) would give orders to units that were assigned to field commands. Perhaps the most flagrant cases involved President Diem himself, who, using his radio net from a van in the garden of the presidential palace, would sometimes send operational orders directly to combat units, bypassing the Ministry of National Defense, the General Staff, and the field commands.

The US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) had proposed a different organizational structure which would have improved command and functional relationships; however, Diem did not accept the proposal. US advisers speculated that perhaps he wished to continue to maintain a division of power and prevent any one individual--other than himself--from having too much authority.<sup>47/</sup> This was confirmed later by former Chairman of the Joint General Staff (JGS), General Cao Van Vien when he said:

True to the nature of an autocratic ruler, he [Diem] did not want anyone individual other than himself to wield too much authority. He preferred to maintain a system of power division in which all subordinates should remain personally loyal to him. Despite objections from the MAAG, President Diem persisted in this practice.<sup>48/</sup>

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Following the overthrow of the Diem Government in 1963, the JGS was transformed into an Armed Forces High Command, and command and control of the RVNAF was returned to the military leadership. This was a period of political uncertainty which saw several governments come and go in rapid succession. The US MAAG had problems in dealing with the politically ambitious ARVN generals who made up the Armed Forces Council and controlled the RVNAF during that period.

The institution of the Second Republic in 1967 under President Nguyen Van Thieu, who assumed his constitutional powers as Commander-in-Chief of the RVNAF, greatly diminished the importance of the JGS in the chain of military command. On paper, the JGS continued to be the command element of the RVNAF; however, for all practical purposes it was reduced to planning and staff supervision. Thieu reserved for himself the promoting of senior commanders, to include division commanders, technical service chiefs and province chiefs, and not infrequently he gave direct orders to his field commanders. That was an unfortunate situation which his Chief of the JGS, General Cao Van Vien, said continued until the collapse of the regime in April 1975.<sup>49/</sup>

### 3. Unit Organization and Equipment

Following the Geneva conference of 1954 and the subsequent division of Vietnam, the RVNAF strength decreased rapidly. The primary cause was a high desertion rate which occurred during the redeployment of troops from North to South Vietnam. French officers and noncommissioned officers were withdrawn during this reorganization period. Army troop strength decreased sharply after 1954, while navy and air force levels gradually increased. The total strength figure for the armed forces receded below the 150,000 recommended by the US.

The US military strategy in Southeast Asia during that timeframe was heavily influenced by the US experience in the Korean conflict. In helping South Vietnam reorganize its national defense, the USMAAG pursued the concept of deploying conventional infantry forces in depth from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) southward to face the eventuality of overt aggression from North Vietnam. As conceived by US advisers, the primary mission

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of the RVNAF in this defensive posture was to fight a delaying-type action in case of an invasion pending a direct intervention by SEATO forces.

From 1957 to 1959, the RVNAF was extensively restructured under US MAAG guidance to meet the threat of external attack. In October 1957, the advisory group began tests to determine the most effective and practical organization for a standard division. The next two years saw more than two hundred tables of organization and equipment (TO&E) and tables of distribution (TDs) developed by US advisers in search for the proper combat organizations. By September 1959, the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) had been organized into seven standard divisions of 10,450 men each and three Army corps headquarters. Each division consisted of three infantry regiments, an artillery battalion, a mortar battalion, an engineer battalion, and company-size support elements. The airborne troops were organized into a five-battalion group and the armor branch into four armored cavalry regiments (roughly equivalent in size to a US Armored Cavalry Squadron). There were also eight independent artillery battalions equipped with 105mm and 155mm howitzers.

The paramilitary Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps were the "poor cousins" of the RVNAF. The Civil Guard (CG), which had been created by presidential decree in 1955, were responsible for relieving the regular forces from internal security and countersubversion duties and the collection of local intelligence information. The CG was initially kept under the direct control of the President, but in 1958 it was placed under the direct control of the Minister of Interior. The Self-Defense Corps, which existed locally also since 1955, was created to provide security at the village and district level. The chain of command for both extended from the Ministry of Interior to the province chiefs, district chiefs and village councils.

Throughout the sixties and early seventies, US advisors, working with their Vietnamese counterparts, were continuously involved in planning to provide the RVNAF with an up-to-date, structurally-balanced military force capable of self-control, self-management and self-support. As viewed by the US leadership, this force was destined to become a war deterrent in

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the event of peace and total US withdrawal. Toward that end the T0&Es were modified to meet the threat as perceived by US MAAG leaders, depicted in Table 5-3 below: 50/

TABLE 5-3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PERCEIVED THREAT AND RVNAF FORCE STRUCTURES

<u>TIME FRAME:</u>	<u>THREAT AS PERCEIVED BY US ADVISORS:</u>	<u>FORCE STRUCTURE PROPOSED BY US ADVISORS:</u>
1955-1960	EXTERNAL ATTACK BY CONVENTIONAL FORCES FROM THE NORTH.	CONVENTIONAL (PATTERNED AFTER US ORGANIZATIONS BUT ON SMALLER SCALE).
1961-1965	INSURGENCY FROM WITHIN SOUTH VIETNAM.	CONTINUED WITH CONVENTIONAL STRUCTURES WITH INCREASED EMPHASIS ON COUNTER INSURGENCY FORCES.
1966-1969	EXTERNAL ATTACK BY CONVENTIONAL FORCES AND INSURGENCY FROM WITHIN.	US CONVENTIONAL FORCES WERE THERE TO HANDLE EXTERNAL THREAT. A CONTINUED COUNTERINSURGENCY FORCE STRUCTURE & EQUIPMENT BUILD-UP (REGIONAL SECURITY).
1970-1973	EXTERNAL ATTACK BY CONVENTIONAL FORCES.	A RETURN TO CONVENTIONAL FORCE STRUCTURES TO MEET THREAT (PULL-OUT OF US GROUND FORCES).

SOURCE: BDM Analysis

#### 4. Critical Issues

The salient critical issue which emerges from this section is that the organizational/functional structure of the RVNAF did not allow for the effective or efficient prosecution of the war. This problem was compounded by an American insistence on organizing the RVNAF in its own image.

##### a. Analysis of the Critical Issue

General Collins, in his study on the development and training of the South Vietnamese Army, 51/ alludes to the fact that initial US advisory efforts in South Vietnam were concentrated on creating a RVNAF which was conventional in tactics and equipment, patterned after standard

US TO&Es and capable of withstanding an invasion from the North. US military leadership at that time did not accurately perceive the real threat of insurgency. General Cao Van Vien, 52/ former chief of the JGS, wrote that President Diem created the Ranger Forces to counter the Viet Cong insurgency. He borrowed the concept from the French commanders of the 1949-1954 conflict. Cao Van Vien claims that Diem's Ranger forces idea was opposed by the US MAAG, which supposedly not only suspected a political motive, but also objected to the transfer of the most experienced officers and men from established units to the Rangers. Notwithstanding these efforts, in General Collin's view, the RVNAF was structured so that it could not adequately cope with the internal insurgency which was consuming the Vietnamese countryside. Until a counterinsurgency plan (CIP) 53/ was adopted by both the US and GVN in 1961, the RVNAF organization proved to be too centralized and its equipment too heavy to counter the rapid growth of the guerrilla war effectively.

The provisions of the CIP tell a good deal about the character of US military assistance and how the Viet Cong threat was viewed by both US and GVN officials at the beginning of the Kennedy administration in 1961. The CIP was a one-time shot or package amounting to about \$42 million which was designed mainly for the initial outfitting of new counterinsurgency forces. For its part, the GVN was expected to pay the local currency costs of the new forces and carry out a number of military and civil reforms. The reforms included the following:

- Establishment of a Central Intelligence Organization.
- Assignment of operational control for counterinsurgency operations within the military chain of command.
- Implementation of several governmental reforms (e.g., a cabinet reorganization).

In response to significant pressure from the US, President Diem finally issued decrees on all the requested reforms and the CIP was given the "green light". The decrees were that, and nothing more. Essentially they were meaningless, since exactly the same issues remained high on the list of "necessary reforms" called for by General Maxwell Taylor

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following his visit to Vietnam later in 1961, and for that matter, persisted throughout the rest of Diem's regime.

The RVNAF found themselves in a position of trying to "catch-up" with an insurgent movement which had begun operations several years before. It became apparent to US advisors that the development of a counterinsurgency force structure for the RVNAF was urgent. Revised programs were developed, organizational changes were made, increased combat support was provided and additional materiel aid was introduced. Early CIP results as reported by the Diem regime appeared favorable and were cause for great official optimism by 1963. But the Buddhist uprising, the overthrow of the Diem government in late 1963, and the subsequent unstable political environment led to a deterioration of the armed forces. The decision to introduce US ground combat forces in 1965 saved the RVN from total military defeat at that time.

The years following 1965 were characterized by continuous efforts to revitalize and improve the combat effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Army with men, money and materiel. The commitment of US ground combat elements took considerable heat off the RVNAF and allowed time for them to regroup and reorganize. Unfortunately, two side effects developed during this period:

- The RVNAF had been relegated to a secondary role in the conduct of the war and was devoted almost entirely to static security missions.
- US combat forces were given first priority for resources, whereas the strengthening of the RVNAF became a second priority.

The large scale of the US involvement after 1965 also precluded extensive equipment modernization for the RVNAF until 1968. Soon after, when the US leadership decided to limit US involvement and Vietnamize the war, the situation once again changed. Beginning in 1969, as the US withdrawal picked up momentum, vast quantities of materiel were made available to RVNAF troops. From 1969 to 1972 American units and commands, together with the US advisory network, hastily worked to prepare the RVNAF to assume responsibility for conduct of the war. The test of the

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effectiveness of that effort came first during the partially successful US/RVNAF incursion into Cambodia in 1970, and then with RVNAF's relatively successful defense against the North Vietnamese "Easter" offensive which was launched at the end of March in 1972. General Westmoreland summarized the results of the latter operation:

Here, apparently, was the ultimate test of the long years of American effort to create viable South Vietnamese armed forces and of the decision taken by my predecessors many years before to organize regular units rather than light antiguerrilla forces. Even as the test developed, the last American battalions began to move, not to help in the fight but to complete American withdrawal...as the results of the test eventually demonstrated, the ARVN, for all of many errors in plans and execution, no longer required the assistance of American ground troops, although their success owed much to American tactical air support.54/

The Easter offensive had ground to a halt by October 1972, and it was evident in Paris that a truce was near. The talks had been going on sporadically since late in the Johnson Administration. In broad terms, the goals of the participating parties during the last years of negotiations can be summed up as follows: The US was looking for a graceful way out, which would leave the GVN with a reasonable chance of survival. The DRV wanted an end to the destruction of their country by US bomber aircraft, plus an agreement that would set the stage for the eventual unification of the two Vietnams. The Thieu government wanted South Vietnam to survive as an independent nation and to retain a US presence in the country for as long as possible. And lastly, the NLF/PRG wanted to retain their foothold in the South.

Following the signing of the Paris Agreements in 1973, it soon became evident that the North was going to remain in the South. The Ho Chi Minh Trail had been converted into a network of all-weather highways; a petroleum pipeline was built; and, supplies, weapons and reinforcements flowed South. In the US, an increasingly assertive Congress was showing less and less inclination to continue their support of the GVN. US military aid to the GVN was cut from over \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 1973 to \$700 million in fiscal year 1975.55/

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Faced with decreasing levels of aid, the RVNAF was forced to cannibalize equipment, defer maintenance and become less able to counter increasingly aggressive PAVN elements. Weakness began to develop; especially in the VNAF's combat aircraft availability and in the ARVN's ability to adapt to the changing combat situation.56/

The ARVN did not make the necessary adjustments readily. For example, President Thieu made a statement in 1974 to instruct his troops on ammunition conservation. He pointed out that the lavish days of American support were over and that "we must fight in a Vietnamese manner," which meant "defeating the enemy by determination rather than materials."57/ Specifically he directed: "Use helicopters only in case of absolute necessity; don't be tied to the Air Force or artillery support."58/ Though sound, after all those years of having been "conditioned" by the presence of extensive US air and artillery support, the RVNAF found the instructions practically impossible to implement meaningfully. Thus, the stage was set by the beginning of 1975 for a military campaign that brought greater and faster results to North Vietnam than even they had anticipated.59/

General Cao Van Vien, in his monograph on RVNAF leadership, holds that failures on the part of national and military leadership, and not military organizational or structural problems, were the decisive factors in the ultimate debacle in 1975 when the PAVN swiftly defeated the RVNAF. He wrote:

Of the flaws and vulnerabilities that military leadership in the RVNAF might have demonstrated, the most detrimental were perhaps political-mindedness and corruption. The November coup of 1963 had changed military leadership so completely that the RVNAF were never the same again. Its effect could still be felt even after elective democracy had been institutionalized. Politics had been so ingrained among senior commanders that it was impossible for them to relinquish it and return to military professionalism. The Thieu regime, in fact, feared not so much the enemy from the outside as those who had once been partners and comrade-in-arms. And that explained why, one by one, the politically ambitious ones had to go but potential rivalry still persisted.60/



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The debacle of 1975 owes much to the way the RVNAF was organized to defend their country. With the exception of the mobile, strategic reserve, (the Airborne and Marine divisions), the remaining ARVN divisions were organized for regional defense (an excellent means for countering insurgency) and were not able to move in a timely fashion to counter the swift NVA attacks emanating from the North and West. The fervor of countering the NVA attack quickly ebbed when ARVN troops began showing more interest in the welfare of their wives and children than their comrades-in-arms who were bearing the brunt of the enemy's attack. General Westmoreland summarized it this way:

Like the regiment of the 23d Division earlier, troops of the 1st ARVN Division--long one of South Vietnam's best--began to look not to the enemy but to the safety of their wives and children.61/

Another example of how US military advice affected the RVNAF establishment can be found in a study of the Vietnamese National Military Academy (NVMA). THE NVMA was founded in December 1948, in the city of Hue, and later moved to Dalat. Under French operation the Academy was simply a nine-month officer training school designed to produce infantry platoon leaders. The school remained under French control until after the Geneva Accords in 1954, when the ARVN took over. In 1955, when the American advisory effort began, the curriculum was extended to one year. In 1956 the program was extended to two years, and in 1959 it was expanded to a full four-year, degree-granting, university-level curriculum. The ambitious US-sponsored program quickly floundered because of the conflicting short-term demand for junior officers to meet expanding force structure needs, and the lack of qualified instructors and cadre. As a result, the academy graduated three-year classes, and in 1963 reverted to the production of enlightened platoon leaders with two years of training. The latter program still fell short of the demand for junior officers.

The NVMA is one of several examples where the US attempted to organize the RVNAF into its own image only to find that further refinements and modifications were necessary in order to come up with a hybrid

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organization that could effectively perform the mission. The net result was that an inordinate quantity of critical resources was used experimenting with various structures which often were based on the assumption that the American way was the best.

### F. SUMMARY ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

The RVNAF underwent several major changes and revisions during its twenty-three years of existence. Over time, the following factors had very dramatic impact on the RVNAF and its ability to function effectively in combat:

- Early domination of the national army by the French left the RVNAF with few capabilities, few qualified military leaders, and a limited organizational structure.
- Initial US advisory efforts focused on a conventional warfare structure for the RVNAF: a misperception of the real threat at that time: insurgency.
- The US tactic of "the carrot and the stick"--making US military support contingent on the GVN taking "corrective measures"--often squeezed meaningless concessions or promises of concessions from the embattled GVN and delayed needed restructuring of the RVNAF.
- The introduction of US forces into the conflict caused the RVNAF to be relegated (once again) to a "second class" role.
- Vietnamization served to increase RVNAF dependence on US resupply and maintenance support (which was severely cut by the Congress after the US withdrawal).
- Major RVNAF combat successes in 1970 and 1972 were heavily dependent on US close air support and tactical airlift.
- Politically ambitious and corrupt leaders undermined the effectiveness of the RVNAF throughout its entire existence.
- The concept of regional defense (with a small mobile reserve) proved inadequate to defend against the final NVA attack in 1975. ARVN soldiers became more concerned about their dependent families than about their battered comrades-in-arms.

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- Having initially been structured for conventional warfare instead of the insurgent threat, the RVNAF--ironically--was not properly structured to meet the powerful and modernized conventional threat that had evolved by 1975.

Former ARVN leaders felt that their army had been organized along the wrong pattern. It had gotten a big logistics "tail" and it lacked the mobile reserve divisions essential to counter a conventional NVA assault.<sup>62/</sup>

Compounding the above problems was an absence of a viable command and planning structure within the RVNAF (the US had all too willingly dominated these functions during its presence) and the lack of effective military leadership at the top. Many senior RVNAF officers had been appointed for reasons of political loyalty or through linkages of corruption rather than for demonstrated military competence. The US entered the Vietnam conflict with the idea that it was a military action that could be resolved through the application of its superior US technology, firepower, and mobility. The war, however, was mainly political in nature and loaded with ideological overtones.

- In a developing, largely rural nation, it is easier and better to train and "equip-up"--as did the Viet Minh and later the PLAF and PAVN by necessity--than it is to try the reverse, under pressure, as did the RVNAF towards the end; they had forgotten "how to walk" and could no longer afford to ride or fly. Further, the dependence on air travel took the South Vietnamese troops away from the people and thus limited their ability to learn of local conditions from villagers or to win their confidence. The VC who fought on foot were more visible to the villagers and, therefore, more able to win their support and control their actions.
- The RVNAF, due to US advice (and insistence) and the ineptness of most of their senior leaders, were unprepared--physically and

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mentally--to meet the enemy at the following critical stages of the conflict:

- In the late 1950's and early 1960's they were organized and trained to fight a possible battle against PAVN forces, but not the real struggle against the NLF and the PLAF forces: The GVN also lacked an effective police and police-intelligence apparatus.
- In Laos, in 1971, they tried--at US urging--to employ US tactics and techniques while lacking the necessary means, experience and leadership. Their ultimate defeat in that campaign should have acted as a warning to both US and RVNAF leadership.
- At the onset of the 1972 Eastern Offensive, they were prepared to fight battles at individual "fire support" bases, but were caught by surprise by the massive mobile warfare tactics and equipment employed by the PAVN.
- In 1975, they still had not absorbed the lessons of 1971 and 1972, and thus were totally unprepared--again--to fight a large scale war requiring rapid movement of forces on the field of battle. At this time, they neither had the means nor the will and logistics to defeat the enemy, but by all indicators they should have done much better than they did in the end.
- Probably the most difficult task undertaken by the US and the greatest failure of the US involvement with the RVNAF, was the need to build a strong and reliable corps of military leaders. Considering the social bases and the backgrounds of most senior leaders perhaps the problem was insoluble, however, the end result should have been better. Regardless, the US did not perceive that the notion of leadership for the South vietnamese was of a different cultural dimension from most Americans.
- In the end, the Vietnamese military leaders found themselves faced with a vicious circle. They were pushed by their US

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counterparts to get rid of corrupt and inept officers. The only way that could be accomplished was to get rid of the corrupt and politicized promotion system. To do that they would have had to overthrow President Thieu who kept tight reigns over the promotion apparatus. Throughout, the US government continued to show strong support for President Thieu (and his policies) and the RVNAF leaders who favored reform were faced with the option of a cut-off of US aid if they took matters into their own hands and deposed Thieu--hence the dilemma. The recognition of cultural differences coupled with the fair and firm application of appropriate leverage applied by the US on the Vietnamese leadership would have improved the quality of RVNAF leaders.

- The American way of organizing and structuring a military organization is not always the only way, nor is it always the best way--indeed, even a democratic form of government is not for everyone. As one former US combat commander aptly put it: "In this, [the Vietnam conflict], as in all our foreign wars, we never really established rapport. This was largely due to our overinflated hypnosis with the myth that the American way--in economics, politics, sociology, manners, morals, military equipment, methodology, organizations, tactics, etc.--is automatically and unchallengeably the best (really the only) way to do things. This failing may well be the area of greatest weakness for the future of American arms."63/

### F. LESSONS

The political role of the Armed Forces of a nation is critical; military forces which form the political base of a regime are often susceptible to politicization whereby the leaders are chosen, promoted, and favored for political loyalty rather than professional military skill.

There is a tendency when advising or assisting an emerging nation's Armed Forces to organize, equip, and train them in one's own image, a

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pattern which is difficult to alter or reverse if the guiding premises prove to be faulty during a conflict.

CHAPTER 5 END NOTES

1. Charles Bain, Vietnam, The Roots of Conflict (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 195-196.
2. Cao Van Vien, General, ARVN, Leadership, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, Prepared for the Dept. of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, (McLean, Va: General Research Corp., July 7, 1978), p. 25.
3. BG James Lawton Collins, Jr., USA, The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army 1950-1972, Vietnam Studies, (Washington DC: Govt. Printing Office, 1975), p. 4.
4. Ngo Quang Truong, General, ARVN, Territorial Forces, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, prepared for the Dept. of the U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, (McLean, VA: General Research Corp., July 28, 1978), p. 24.
5. Ibid, p. 25.
6. Ibid, p. 26. According to Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, who was Ambassador to Thailand at that time, Ambassador Durbrow in Saigon had violent arguments about ARVN being structured along American lines, but no one in the State Department took up the argument. The real first line of defense was the RF and PF, but they were treated as second-class citizens. Interviews with Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson at The BDM Corporation, 9 January 1979.  
  
General Maxwell D. Taylor also commented on the period in which LTG Samuel T. Williams was Chief MAAG, stating that Williams was doing what the JCS told him to do and that the most visible threat was the NVA buildup.  
  
General Maxwell D. Taylor, US Air Force Oral History Program, Interview No. 501, by Major Richard B. Clement and Mr. Jacob Van Staavern, 11 January 1972, p. 6 (Declassified 31 December 1978).
7. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, p. 31.
8. Collins, pp. 65-66.
9. "The Military Balance, 1978-79...Other Asian Countries and Australia," Air Force Magazine, December 1978, p. 105. See also Chapter 6, Volume VI of this study.
10. Edwin Bickford Hooper, Dean C. Allard, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict. Volume I, The Setting of the Stage to 1959 (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1976), p. 227.

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11. Ibid., pp. 336 and 343.
12. Colonel Victor J. Croizat, USMC (Ret), "Vietnamese Naval Forces: Origin of the Species," in The Marines in Vietnam 1954-1973. An Anthology and Annotated Bibliography (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1974), p. 58. Colonel Croizat became the first advisor to the Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC) in 1954.
13. Ray L. Bowers, "Defeat and Retaliation: The Communist Triumph," The Vietnam War (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 230.
14. General Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse. Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program, Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History (McLean, VA.: General Research Corporation, 1976), pp. 61-64 reports that VNN activities were reduced by an average 50% with riverine operations cut 72%. Over 600 river craft and boats had to be inactivated because of reductions in US aid.
15. U.S. Department of Defense, United States - Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, a Study Prepared by the U.S. Dept. of Defense for House Committee on Armed Services, Book 1 of 12, (Washington DC: Gov't. Printing Office, 1971), p. A-20.
16. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, p. 13.
17. Ibid, p. 14.
18. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces: The Formative Years, 1945-1955, Military History (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Defense, J-5/JGS, Military History Division, 1972), p. 12.
19. Collins, p. 97.
20. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, pp. 52-55. It was the battle of Ap Bac that highlighted the growing discord between officials of the US country team and representatives of the media. Also see David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 15-162 for a description of the battle and the media's handling of it. In both his oral history transcript and a letter to The BDM Corporation, in response to a series of questions relating to lessons learned in Vietnam, General Paul Harkins blames Halberstam for influencing the other reporters in Saigon and turning them against President Diem. General Harkins dismissed the battle of Ap Bac as a village having been occupied by the VC for only 24 hours; he did comment that a "young ambitious and excitable advisor there" ( LTC John Paul Vann) had gotten to the press, berated the South Vietnamese troops, and caused major headlines and major headaches for all concerned. Letter from General Paul D. Harkins to The BDM Corporation, dated 29 August



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1979. Also see the transcript of General Harkins interview, US Military History Research Collection, Senior Officers Debriefing Program, Military History Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., pp. 53, 60, 69.

21. Commander in Chief Pacific and Commander US Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Report on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 June 1968) (Washington, US Government Printing Office, 1968). Hereafter cited as CINCPAC/COMUSMACV Report.
22. Ibid, p. 212.
23. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, op. cit.
24. CINCPAC/COMUSMACV Report, p. 213.
25. Ibid., p. 214.
26. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, pp. 123-127.
27. Cao Van Vien, The Final Collapse, pp. 110-132 describes the decision to reoccupy Ban Me Thuot and the disastrous rout that resulted in the loss of MR-2. MG Pham Van Phu reported to President Thieu that the north-south route joining Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot was blocked by PAVN forces. As a result, he had to deploy southeast towards Tuy Hoa on the coast before turning west and moving on Ban Me Thuot (p. 113). Also see MG Charles J. Timmes, USA (ret), "Military Operations After the Cease-Fire Agreement," Part II. Military Review, September 1976, p. 24; Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, Brian M. Jenkins, The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders (Santa Monica, Cal.: The Rand Corporation, December 1978), p. 90; and Senior General Van Tien Dung, "Great Spring Victory," Volume I of two-volume supplement. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS APA 76-110, 7 June 1976, Vol. IV, No. 110, Supp. 38, p. 46.
28. Ibid., p. 124.
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30. Colonel H. C. B. Cook, "Shaky Dike Against a Red Flood," reprinted from the London Daily Telegraph, in Bangkok World, March 15, 1962; cited by Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 328.
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32. Maxwell D. Taylor, Report to the President on his mission to South Vietnam, dated 3 November 1961. Senator Gravel, the Gravel Edition, The Pentagon Papers, Vol. II (Boston, Ma: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 95, 652-654.

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33. Ibid., pp. 95-96.
34. Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense, "Memorandum For The President," Subject: Vietnam Situation, Dec. 1964, pp. 1-3.
35. Ibid., p. 1.
36. Ibid.
37. Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Vol. II, pp. 192-193.
38. William R. Corson, Consequences of Failure (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1974), Appendix, pp. 175-205.
39. Ibid., pp. 192-193.
40. Ibid., p. 193.
41. Frank Snepp, Decent Interval (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 66-216.
42. Ibid., p. 163.
43. Col. Richard A. McMahon, Army Attache, US Embassy, Saigon, South Vietnam, Intelligence Report, "Assessment of Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) (U)," DA Form 2496, 5 July 1974, pp. 2-4.
44. Figure 5-3 is based upon the BDM study team's analysis of the material contained in the sources shown in the bibliography to this volume.
45. Dennis J. Duncanson, Government and Revolution in Vietnam (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 216.
46. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, p. 29.
47. Collins, pp. 10-11.
48. Cao Van Vien, Leadership, pp. 39-41.
49. Cao Van Vien, The US Adviser, pp. 29-30.
50. Table 5-3 is based upon the BDM study team's analysis of the material contained in the sources shown in the bibliography to this volume and the research accomplished in preparing Volume VI, "Conduct of the War."
51. Collins, pp. 127-130.
52. Cao Van Vien, The US Adviser, pp. 30-31.

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53. Gravel, Pentagon Papers, Vol. II, p. 23.
54. William C. Westmoreland, General, USA, A Soldier Reports (Garden City N.J.: Doubleday & Co., 1976), p. 392.
55. Douglas Kinnard, The War Managers, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Univ. of Vermont, 1977), pp. 152-154.
56. Stephen T. Hosmer, et. al., The Fall of South Vietnam, pp. 70-72.
57. Kinnard, p. 155.
58. Ibid.
59. Hosmer, et. al., p. 73.
60. Cao Van Vien, The US Adviser, pp. 168-169.
61. Westmoreland, p. 401.
62. Hosmer, et. al., p. 129.
63. Kinnard, p. 92.

CHAPTER 6  
MORALE AND WILL

Morale in ARVN is difficult to assess. Some commanders claim it is good, others say it is bad, and all say it is affected by the inadequate pay of the soldier. Establishing and maintaining high morale in ARVN has some prodigious road blocks to surmount. Good morale is difficult to instill in a soldier who has been drafted for the duration of a war that has already lasted 20 years and shows no sign of ending. With little chance for rotation from a combat unit except in a wheelchair or a coffin, morale at the front is hard to maintain. High morale is impossible for soldiers who do not get enough pay to support their families and whose commanders will rarely grant them leave for fear that they will not return (and many of them do not).1/

Colonel Richard A. McMahon, US Army  
Attaché 1974.

One observer summarized the collapse of morale by declaring that it had been undermined by South Vietnam's history of political instability, coups, and the frustrations of war...the collapse was "really not all that sudden." What had perhaps been most demoralizing of all was, as one respondent put it, "everyone's conviction that the enemy would never give up."2/

Rand report, 1978

A. INTRODUCTION

The morale and will of any group of people are not easily measured. Because of the somewhat intangible and nebulous nature of the subject matter, this chapter focuses on identifying those factors which illustrate the varying degrees of support provided the GVN war effort by its people, and the increases or decreases of that support during successive phases of US involvement from 1954 to 1975.

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### B. THE CHALLENGE OF BUILDING NATIONAL SUPPORT

Given similar hostile conditions as detailed in the preceding chapters, any government would have had difficulty in establishing a consensus of popular support. The GVN was no exception. It faced a variety of separate interest groups within a seriously fragmented society that included the following:

- Urban and rural elites who held positions of leadership in the GVN and the military and whose needs were satisfied through maintenance of the status quo.
- Merchants who needed secure transportation routes and stable financial conditions to pursue commercial activities.
- Rural population of farmers who comprised the largest sector of the South Vietnamese population and for whom security and accessibility to markets were serious problems.
- Urban families that were affected by inflation and availability of food at reasonable prices.
- Religious and ethnic minorities such as Buddhists, Montagnards, Chinese and Khmers and various armed sects including Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen, each of which wanted to protect its own vested interests.
- Armed forces ranging from regular military units to local regional and popular forces, each receiving different pay and privileges, and each owing allegiance to a different authority.

When the two Vietnams emerged from the rubble of French Indochina in 1954, the DRV set about to attain its major goal--the unification of both North and South under the banner of the Lao Dong Party. The South, on the other hand, although plagued with the fragmented society and special interest groups outlined above, worked to build a viable government of its own and to create popular support for the government and its leaders. The DRV leadership hoped that the elections promised for 1956 would take place and would result in a unified Vietnam. Despite that hope, at least one faction within the Politburo preferred that unification occur as a result of an

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armed struggle. In either event, the Viet Minh's elite political and guerrilla leaders operating in Cochinchina left a nucleus behind in 1954 when the bulk of the Viet Minh and their families departed for North Vietnam.

The deliberate use of stay behinds strongly suggests that the DRV anticipated the use of force later. This conclusion is supported by evidence that large quantities of weapons and ammunition were carefully preserved and hidden in caches throughout South Vietnam. The stay-behind Viet Minh soldiers were ready for guerrilla operations, terrorism, or support of an all-out PAVN attack against the RVN--whatever the Lao Dong party might order.

When the promised elections did not take place in 1956, the old Viet Minh cadres began to emerge from their strongholds in the Delta and elsewhere. This marked the beginning of organized efforts to undermine the GVN and to weaken the morale and will of the people of South Vietnam.

### C. FACTORS THAT AFFECTED SOUTH VIETNAMESE MORALE AND WILL

A review of literature, analytical works, official reports, monographs prepared by former GVN civilian and military leaders, and interviews with US authorities on the war highlighted the following factors which are considered to have significantly affected the morale and will of the South Vietnamese people throughout the war.

#### 1. National Liberation Front (NLF) (Viet Cong) Terror Tactics

Autocratic governments and desperate revolutionaries are often adept in the use of terror. The Vietnamese Communists proved they were masters at terror tactics, having learned their lessons well from their Soviet and Chinese comrades. Indeed, the use of terror was one of the principal tactics used by the DRV leadership to implement its population-control programs in North Vietnam, euphemistically known as land reform. In South Vietnam, communist NLF cadres spread fear and panic, and in many areas successfully destroyed the governmental structure through terrorism and assassination.

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During an exchange of letters with President Kennedy in 1961, President Diem characterized the NLF's terror tactics in the South as follows:

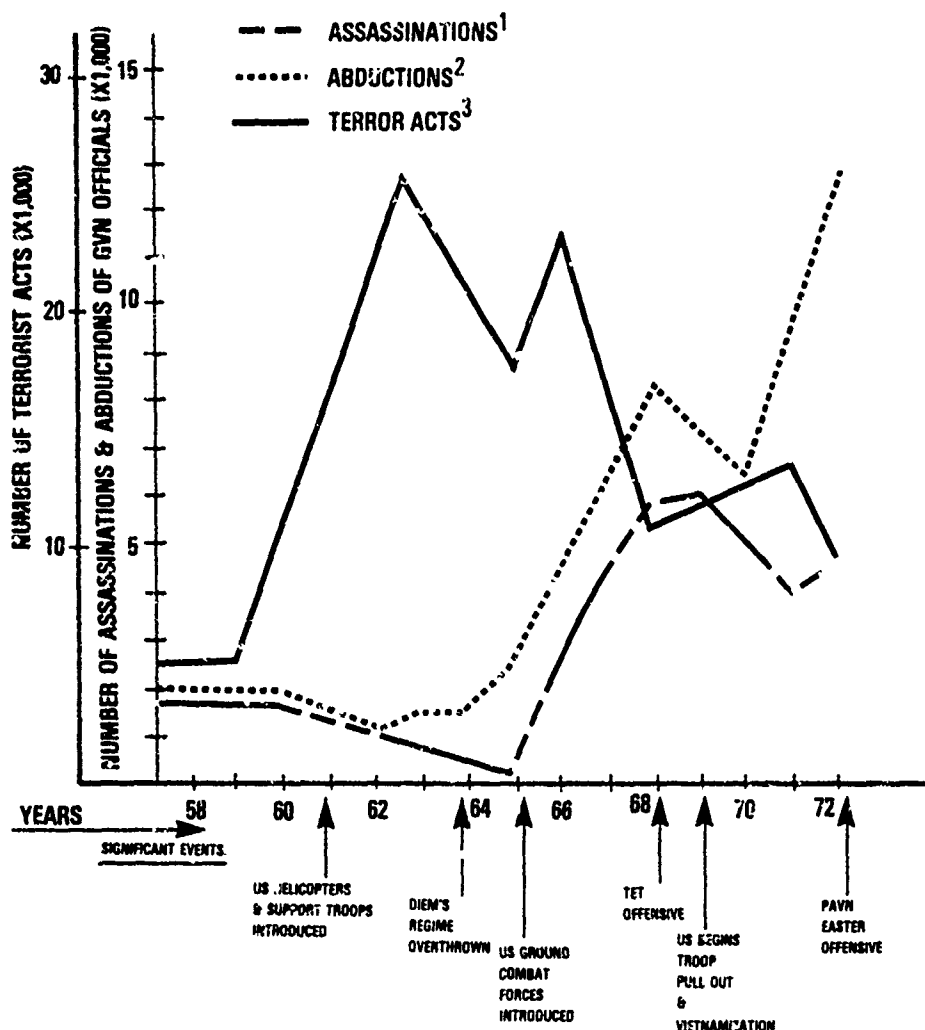
From the beginning, the Communists resorted to terror in their efforts to subvert our people, destroy our government and impose a communist regime upon us. They have attacked defenseless teachers, closed schools, killed members of our anti-malarial program and looted hospitals. This is coldly calculated to destroy our government's humanitarian efforts to serve our people....The level of their attacks is already such that our forces are stretched to the utmost. We are forced to defend every village, every hamlet, indeed every home against a foe whose tactic is always to strike at the defenseless.<sup>3/</sup>

The NLF employed two types of terrorism, individual and indiscriminate, to create massive insecurity throughout the South Vietnamese countryside. With the first type a successful act of terror showed the population that no man was safe if he had been marked an enemy of the Party. The second, an intentional act aimed at unknown victims, left the people feeling vulnerable everywhere, anytime. These actions were designed to discredit the GVN by showing that it could neither control insurgent forces nor defend its own population. Figure 6-1 provides data on NLF/PAVN assassinations and abductions in South Vietnam from 1957-1972.

The NLF also used deliberate mass terror attacks. They did this, either by advertising communist activity in a village in order to encourage attack from opposing forces or by actually attacking an area with the intention of killing civilians.

The NLF also employed proselyting techniques and peer pressure in efforts to gain control of the population in the South. The most effective, and hence most often used, method of control was the highly credible threat of physical harm brought against South Vietnamese who continued to support the GVN. Figure 6-2 illustrates the broad spectrum of communist techniques of repression.

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## FOOT NOTES

1. UNTIL MAY 1967 THE FIGURES ARE FOR ASSASSINATIONS OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ONLY, AND NOT KILLINGS OF OTHER CIVILIANS (RECORDS WERE KEPT ONLY ON OFFICIALS AND EVEN THESE ARE INCOMPLETE.) BASED ON A 1964 STUDY IT PROBABLY IS SAFE TO CONCLUDE THAT FOR EVERY OFFICIAL VIETNAMESE ASSASSINATED, AT LEAST FOUR NON-OFFICIALS WERE KILLED.

2. AS IN THE CASE OF ASSASSINATION, THE ONLY RECORDS OF KIDNAPINGS KEPT PRIOR TO MAY 1967 WERE KIDNAPINGS OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. IN LIGHT OF A 1964 STUDY, IT IS SAFE TO CONCLUDE THAT FOR EVERY GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL KIDNAPED, TWO NON GOVERNMENT PERSONS WERE SEIZED. THE GVN REPORTED TO THE ICC IN 1968 THESE KIDNAPING FIGURES (GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT TOTALS): 1962, 10,000; 1963, 7,200; 1964, 10,450; 1965, 11,500.

3. INCLUDES SABOTAGE, HARRASSING FIRE, VISITS BY ARMED PROPAGANDA TEAMS TO VILLAGES, "VC WAR BOND" SALES, CONFISCATION OF FOOD, BUT NOT THE OTHER ACTS OF TERROR LISTED IN AFOREMENTIONED FOOTNOTES.

4541/78W

SOURCES: OSAD (PA), Atrocity Fact Sheet, and Douglas Pike, The Viet Cong Strategy of Terror, 1970

Figure 6-1. Assassinations and Abductions of GVN Officials Attributed to NLF/PAVN Insurgents in SVN, 1957-1972



PRELIMINARY ACTIONS	SUPPRESSION	SEVERE PUNISHMENT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PROSELYTIZING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DIRECTED AT RVNAF AND CIVILIANS.</li> <li>• USE OF THEATER TROOPS.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ARREST AND INTERROGATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRELUDE TO MORE SEVERE REPRESSION</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ARREST AND INTERROGATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INCLUDES USE OF TORTURE.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. BLACKLISTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COMPRISED OF INDIVIDUALS MARKED AS OPPONENTS OF REVOLUTION.</li> <li>• INTERROGATION USED IN COLLECTING BLACKLIST DATA.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. I.-PLACE REFORM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VILLAGE INDOCTRINATION CLASSES 3-7 DAYS (PUPILS CONFESS CRIME AND PROMISE SUPPORT TO COMMUNISTS).</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. ABDUCTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PRELUDE TO ALL SEVERE PUNISHMENTS.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. WARNINGS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISSUED TO GVN SUPPORTERS.</li> <li>• INCLUDES PUBLIC CONFESSION BY OFFICIAL.</li> <li>• FAMILY IS ALSO HELD RESPONSIBLE.</li> <li>• DELIVERED IN LETTER FORM, PUBLIC POSTERS OR PERSONALLY BY LOCAL CADRE OR RELATIVES OF THE ACCUSED.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. HOME SURVEILLANCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INDIVIDUALS CONFINED TO VILLAGE.</li> <li>• ATTENDANCE IN REFORM CLASS.</li> <li>• REQUIRED TO CONFESS CRIMES IN PUBLIC.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. THOUGHT REFORM CAMPS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FORCED LABOR AND INDOCTRINATION.</li> <li>• USUALLY IN REMOTE, HEAVILY GUARDED AREAS.</li> <li>• USUALLY NOT USED FOR ARVN PRISONERS (SEPARATE FACILITIES).</li> <li>• PRISONERS - SUSPECTED OR KNOWN MEMBERS OF GVN - AND UNCOOPERATIVE CIVILIANS.</li> <li>• HIGH MORTALITY RATE DUE TO POOR CONDITIONS, TORTURE.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. REDUCTION IN PRESTIGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USUALLY FOR OFFICIALS FORCED TO CONFESS CRIMES AND TO CONDEMN GVN.</li> <li>• VILLAGERS TO JUDGE OFFICIALS TO DETERMINE WHETHER MORE PUNISHMENT IS NECESSARY.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. EXECUTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INDIVIDUALS WHO COMMITTED SEVERE CRIMES (ESPIONAGE, DEFECTION, MEMBER OF GVN LEADERSHIP).</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

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SOURCE: Hosmer, Viet Cong Repression and Its Implications for the Future, 1970

Figure 6-2. The Spectrum of Techniques of Repression

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Potential targets for NLF terrorist attacks were:

- Public security officials
- Military and para-military officials
- RVN government officials or civil servants and their family members
- Opposition political party officials
- Opposition religious leaders
- Thieves, prostitutes, corrupt opportunists, speculators, and assassins
- GVN intelligence operatives
- School teachers known to be loyal to GVN
- Village or hamlet leaders known to be GVN sympathizers

As Douglas Pike 4/ and Gunther Lewy 5/ each point out in their reviews of communist-published statements and literature, the word terror was never used per se. For example a victim was seldom "shot or decapitated"; he was "punished" or the "Front exercised its power." The victim was never a civil servant but a "puppet repressor" or a "cruel element;" he was never a policeman but a "secret agent" or "lackey henchman." One was never a member of a political or religious group opposing the communists but a "key reactionary" or "recalcitrant element" of an "oppressive organization." Always "cruel fascists" were "brought to justice" or "criminal acts against patriots avenged," not that non-combatants had been killed. Most of the hopeless victims were peasants, farmers, teachers, social workers and the like who sided with the GVN, but by dehumanizing them in this way the use of terror could be rationalized by the NLF.

The record confirms that NLF terrorist actions were often deliberately indiscriminate, designed to cause death and injury to whomever might come into the path of their mines, booby traps and rockets, and that the number of noncombatants killed and wounded, through deliberate targeting or indiscriminate attacks on populated areas, was indeed substantial. The use of terror tactics employed against civilians constituted an integral part of communist strategy, although it was in violation of the most basic principle of humanitarian conduct in time of war which forbids deliberate attacks on civilian populations.

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Jeffery Race, in his book War Comes to Long An argues that "violence may explain the cooperation of a few individuals, but it cannot explain the cooperation of a whole social class."6/ That the NLF had a "popular" cause, the unification of Vietnam, in which it believed fervently gave it some advantage in terms of morale vis a vis the GVN. While the apparent ruthlessness of the NLF terror (e.g., especially during their Tet attack and occupation of Hue in 1968) left a deep feeling of revulsion among people of South Vietnam, Race argues the following:

The lesson of Long An is that what was attacked was a particular form of social organization, and only consequentially the government itself. But because the government relied upon a certain constellation of social forces, it died when its host died ... the party [NLF], because of the kind of society which it promised, was able to motivate greater forces than was the government, and because of its superior strategy, to employ them more effectively. The same population groups were available to either side, and which side they elected to cooperate with was determined by which side developed superior policies.7/

Although NLF terrorist acts, coupled with the lack of local security, which will be discussed below, contributed significantly to the erosion of the peoples' support for the GVN, the GVN was able to implement several pacification programs which struck at the heart of the NLF apparatus in the village or hamlet known as the VC infrastructure (VCI). The allies realized that as long as the NLF maintained its strength amid the rural population, the military victories scored by US and GVN forces in the war against the communist forces would be largely irrelevant. The belated realization of the importance of destroying this politico-military apparatus (the VCI) led to the establishment of the Phoenix Program (Phuong Hoang).10/ The effectiveness of this and other programs is discussed later.

### 2. Insufficient Local Security

To the GVN the key to popular allegiance was its ability to protect its people. Only in cities and important population centers, areas where they enjoyed superior forces, and in well-organized villages such as

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those inhabited by the Catholics and the Hoa Hao, did the people enjoy a good measure of security. The rest of the country rarely knew safety at all; RVNAF forces often controlled the contested countryside during the day and the NLF controlled it during the night. GVN outposts were numerous, but their effectiveness was limited. After late 1968, the strength of the Self-Defense militia was increased greatly. Still, at the hamlet and village level the Peoples' Self-Defense and Popular Forces were usually encamped in and around the village headquarters and rarely extended their night control to more than the immediate local area. Generals Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho characterized the Self-Defense militia as "not well organized and not motivated enough to fight", adding that their "territorial intelligence network was virtually non-existent."9/ The net result was that NLF assassination squads and tax collectors seldom encountered opposition at night and could operate with impunity.

The rural populace lived in a state of fear and uncertainty. Taxes often had to be paid to both the GVN and the NLF. From the outside the rural life appeared to be normal, however, hamlet inhabitants were usually subjected to two systems of control and they continued to provide manpower and resources for both sides. General Nguyen Duy Hinh claims that this situation was the reason why during the best years, in terms of security and rice production, the cities were still experiencing a shortage of rice and the GVN was forced to initiate a rice import program.10/

Changes in the security situation caused many South Vietnamese people to develop a neutral attitude or posture in the struggle for control of the countryside. The higher the intensity of the war, the more contributions the NLF seemed to be able to exact from the people, who, though apparently hating the communists for such action, maintained a fence-sitting posture in order to survive. Many rural people found a non-committal attitude the wisest approach to survival. The establishment of "free-fire zones," each such zone requiring approval by GVN authorities, also hazarded many people and contributed to an increase in the number of refugees.

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### 3. Weak GVN/Local Leadership

The South Vietnamese lacked stable and competent leadership, civil and military, at both the national and local levels to counter adequately and effectively the NLF/PAVN assault on their nation. General Cao Van Vien, in his reflections on the war, states that this scarcity of leadership "stemmed primarily from the fact that the majority of outstanding nationalist leaders had perished at the hands of French colonialists and Vietnamese Communists and during the long war against both of them."11/

For all his flaws, Diem must be credited with having provided the country with strong leadership. He established a national authority, developed the economy, reorganized the armed forces and turned South Vietnam into a nation of world stature. To combat NLF insurgency activities the GVN instituted the Strategic Hamlet program. On the negative side, Diem, aided and advised by his brother Nhu, so dominated every phase of the national government during his eight-year reign that top level civilian and military leaders had no chance to assert or develop their leadership qualities.

Similarly, under Diem local leadership talent was not given the opportunity to excell as province chiefs were appointed by Diem and were in fact to serve as the president's representatives. General Cao Van Vien commented on the consequences of that style of "representative" government.

...several province chiefs considered themselves and actually acted as sovereigns in their own kingdoms, bypassing ministerial channels... A worst case in point was the province chief of Long An, then Colonel Mai Ngoc Duoc, who acted as if he were the President himself.12/

Under these circumstances, would-be local leaders were not given the chance to exercise their talents.

The weaknesses found in local leadership have also been attributed to the fact that the ongoing war reduced considerably the pool of village males who would be most suited to positions of leadership. Few village-born popular candidates were available for such positions and those

individuals who did seek local office were all too often affiliated with special religious groups (whose general interests lay primarily in self-promotion) or were sponsored by the province governments.<sup>13/</sup>

The death of Diem in 1963 resulted in a leadership crisis because not one of the successful coup-plotting generals could fill his shoes. National leadership broke down into factions that fought among themselves for ascendancy. There was a sudden awareness of political power among the officers corps, especially the generals.

The overthrow of Diem was followed by several years of political instability with both military and civilian leadership unsuccessfully attempting to form stable governments. A degree of stability returned in 1965 when ten "young turk" generals formed a National Leadership Committee. General Nguyen Van Thieu became chief of state and Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky became prime minister. So began the reign of President Thieu.

A recent report, prepared by the RAND Corporation for the Department of Defense, which gives the views of former GVN officials on the reasons for the sudden RVN collapse in 1975, reveals that President Thieu's colleagues had very few good things to say about their old leader. Though some gave him high marks as a military commander, others considered him inept as a political and military leader. They claimed that he appointed incompetent and corrupt men to high military positions; that he had a virtual passion for inaction; that his leadership was impaired by the fact that he trusted nobody and was not trusted by anybody; and that he was involved in the extensive corruption which plagued the country. As for other aspects of the leadership in the GVN, the comments were mostly negative--ranging from passivity in leadership to corruption at all levels.<sup>14/</sup>

4. Corrupt GVN/Local Officials

Widespread corruption at all levels of the GVN was another important factor that had an impact on the morale and will of the people. Official corruption is defined as that which exceeded traditional limits of what might have been accepted to be within the bounds of propriety.

In a society in which most people had little contact with their central government and where no premium was placed on action, bribery had the characteristic of a tax which had to be paid by those few who approached officials with a request for action. However, the large and often poorly managed aid programs introduced by the US created opportunities exceeding traditionally acceptable limitations on the use of public office for private gain. Graft and bribery soon went beyond reasonable limits and became exposed to public view in the form of ostentatious high living. The fact that GVN officials and military leaders used and subverted the war effort for personal gain began to alienate and embitter the people and corruption became a deterrent to victory.

Guenter Lewy, in his analysis of the war, provides the following sage observation:

That the 'corrupt' Saigon government was a major cause of the VC insurgency has often been argued by critics of American policy in Vietnam. This idea is surely too simplistic: honest governments are not necessarily immune to guerrilla insurgency.<sup>15/</sup>

Lewy also makes light of the fact that "self-righteous" finger pointers failed to consider the "systematic corruption built into communist societies," on the one hand, and "acknowledge the continued existence of corruption in our own country."<sup>16/</sup> He concluded that GVN corruption was a major cause of the slowness and ineptness with which the government in Saigon and in the provinces responded to the NLF and NVA threat.

A recent compilation of interviews with former South Vietnamese leaders portrays the corruption issue as a fundamental ill that was largely responsible for the ultimate collapse of South Vietnam. A former RVNAF commander was quoted as follows:

Corruption always engenders social injustice. In Vietnam, a country at war, social injustice was more striking than in any other country. Corruption had created a small elite which held all the power and wealth, and a majority of middle-class people and peasants who became poorer and poorer and who suffered

all the sacrifices. It was these people who paid the taxes to the government, the bribes to the police, who had to buy fertilizer at exorbitant prices and to sell their rice at a price fixed by the government, and it was also these people who sent their sons to fight and die for the country while high government officials and wealthy people sent theirs abroad.... The government professed to win the heart and the mind of the people, but all it had done was to create a widening gap between the leadership and the mass; and this increasing conflict, this internal contradiction, if we were to use Communist parlance, could not last; it had somehow to be resolved. Unfortunately it was resolved in the Communist way.17/

5. Morale and Will of the RVNAF

The morale and will of the South Vietnamese soldier and his belief or commitment to the worth of the larger political and social system for which he was asked to risk his life, undoubtedly had a significant impact on the morale and will of the total population. (See Chapter 5)

According to the record, the morale and will of the ARVN soldier was adversely affected by so many factors it was remarkable that he was able to fight at all.18/ This was particularly true for the period when most US ground combat forces had left and US military aid was declining in volume. In a 1974 evaluation of the RVNAF, the US Army Attache to GVN gave the following reasons for poor combat performance and low morale among SVN soldiers:19/

- Mediocre, unimaginative and indecisive leadership.
- Inadequate pay and poor leave policies.
- Inadequate logistics and support systems.
- Shortages of POL and ammunition.
- Serious disciplinary problems.
- Flagrant corruption.

Those factors influenced the ARVN soldiers' support of the war and caused many to desert a system which cared very little about the individual. The desertion figures were particularly high in 1966 when only one out of every seven South Vietnamese called upon for military service answered the call.20/ Figure 6-3 provides data on troop desertion from



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## NET DESERTIONS<sup>a</sup>

NET DESERTIONS PER 1,000 PER MONTH  
GROSS DESERTIONS PER 1,000 PER MONTH  
ARVN COMBAT UNITS  
ARVN NONCOMBAT UNITS  
REGIONAL FORCES  
POPULAR FORCES

1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
<u>77,714</u>	<u>116,064</u>	<u>107,942</u>	<u>126,753</u>	<u>140,177</u>
10.5	11.8	9.2	10.1	11.2
-	-	11.5	12.3	13.2 <sup>b</sup>
-	-	28.2	32.2	35.6 <sup>b</sup>
-	-	5.4	5.9	7.0 <sup>b</sup>
-	-	11.9	10.9	10.7 <sup>b</sup>
-	-	5.1	7.4	7.9 <sup>b</sup>

SOURCES: OASD (Comptroller), Sea Statistical Summary, Table 3, 26 September 1973, and Tables 7,9 February 1972. OASD (SA), Sea Analysis Report, June/July 1971

<sup>a</sup> ADJUSTED FOR THE APPROXIMATELY 14 PERCENT OF DESERTERS WHO RETURNED TO THEIR UNITS.

<sup>b</sup> THROUGH APRIL 1971.

Figure 6-3. RVNAF Desertions, 1967-71

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1967-1971. As the war became prolonged, net desertions increased to 140,177 soldiers in 1971. ARVN combat units suffered the highest desertion rate.

The RVNAF leadership is discussed in Chapter 5, but it is worth noting in this chapter what William Corson calls the "desultory fashion" in which the ARVN leadership fought the war. The following paragraph illustrates the malaise present within the leadership, an indifference which carried down to the individual soldier and ultimately influenced the civilian population's perceptions of the government in charge of the war.

After twenty years of fighting, war has become a way of life for leadership of the ARVN. They are in no hurry to pursue the enemy, for from their point of view the goal is not to defeat the enemy, but to maintain their position, receive promotions, and enhance their personal fortunes. Combat, at best, is an extracurricular activity to be engaged in as a last resort.<sup>21/</sup>

Pay inequities existed not only between officers and soldiers, but between the Regional Force and Popular Force soldiers and the ARVN soldiers. The RF and PF soldiers, "operating at the local level possess the greatest potential for protecting the people and defeating the Vietcong in the true battlefield area, that of the village-hamlet environment."<sup>22/</sup> However, compared to the ARVN forces they were given extremely poor treatment by the GVN. Suffering three to four times the casualties of the ARVN, the RF and PF troops received only half the pay.<sup>23/</sup> Further, their disablement and death benefits were much inferior to those of ARVN forces. It is not surprising that low morale prevailed among the RF and PF forces, thereby reducing their effectiveness in support of the total war effort. Corson, in his examination of the treatment of the widows of RF and PF soldiers killed in action, found that payments were often delayed as much as eight to ten months and that few widows ever received more than two or three payments. In a side issue on corruption, Colonel Corson stated, "until we 'persuaded' the district chief to pay the benefits in accordance with the law, he had been deducting a significant percentage to defray his costs of office."<sup>24/</sup>

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A further cause of low morale among the armed forces concerned the traditional elitist requirements for officer appointments. Under Diem, most key officer assignments and promotions were based on three criteria:

- the candidate had to be a native of the central region
- he had to be a Roman Catholic
- he had to be a member of the Can Lao Party (Diem's party) 25/

Hence, the fact that the assignment of most unit commanders was based on these criteria produced adverse effects on the performance of the armed forces, for those who did not meet the traditional standards became disenchanted. The PAVN and PLAF, on the other hand, based promotions on fighting ability.

Lacking a consistent system of promotions, it could take an ARVN officer from two to ten years to rise from lieutenant to captain, depending on the political and family ties of the individual officer. 26/ Such class consciousness inevitably caused considerable resentment among soldiers, most of whom were from the rural, peasant farming areas, and it is not surprising that they should have felt little loyalty to a system that prevented them from gaining promotions. The frustrations of the soldier were often manifested in his attitude toward the villagers and peasants, and there are numerous accounts of ARVN-troop abuse of the peasants whom they were supposed to be protecting. While this matter was of great concern to US advisors throughout our involvement, producing positive change through US-initiated programs was not easy. For example, the program to reorient troop and officer attitudes toward the South Vietnamese people suggested by COMUSMACV produced very meager results, 27/ and any action of that kind by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) required constant prodding.

General Westmoreland took the morale issue seriously, noting, "low fighting strength bred caution, a defensive attitude, pressures to avoid casualties, and thus poor morale and more desertions." 28/ Under his direction, the US instituted several programs to reduce the high desertion rates and to improve morale. Specifically, he directed the 'adoption' of certain ARVN units by US units. That program was to assist the ARVN in combined tactical operations and to help in providing such amenities as

adequate dependent housing.<sup>29/</sup> In efforts to combat desertion the RVNAF introduced a number of measures. Improved leave policies, a more equitable promotion policy and veteran rehabilitation programs were a few of the more significant changes undertaken.

Like everything else in South Vietnam, under the force of the final DRV offensive in 1975, the RVNAF's morale and will to continue the fight also collapsed. The RAND report on the final collapse cited the following as the primary causes of the ultimate outcome <sup>30/</sup>:

- (1) A Complete Psychological Collapse. There was what the last Prime Minister, Nguyen Ba Can, called the complete "psychological collapse" that hit everyone in South Vietnam, from President Thieu on down to the last soldier and civilian, because the "war had lasted too long, had been too costly, and had offered too few prospects of favorable termination."
- (2) Refusal to Fight. Commanders, whether on Thieu's orders or on their own, had allegedly refused to fight and in fact abandoned their units in many cases.
- (3) Deals Had Been Made With the NVA. There was the belief spread by rumors that "deals" had been made to abandon areas of SVN to the NVA or that the advancing enemy would soon swamp the areas where the soldiers' families lived. At that point many soldiers apparently deserted, perhaps not so much to save their own lives as to save the lives of their families (in the minds of some, the presence of soldiers' families in contested areas proved to be a fatal morale hazard for ARVN troops).

6. Other Factors

Several other factors had an effect on the morale and will of the South Vietnamese people:

- (1) Economic Problems. Throughout most of the second Indochina War, economic problems were a main cause for low morale among both urban and rural populations. In a JUSPAO survey conducted in January 1966 rural and urban samples were similar in their responses; 52% of the urban dwellers and 56% of the rural

dwellers thought that economic conditions were worse than they had been in 1965. A random sample surveyed in Saigon in June and July 1966 listed high living costs as outweighing all other problems confronting the people in their daily lives. Insecurity ranked remarkably low in the context of problems listed by respondents. By 1969, attention of urban dwellers turned from prosecution of the war to the achievement of peace. In soundings taken in April, October and November 1968 half or more of the Saigon public had indicated that they felt less secure than before Tet. In January 1969, for the first time, a substantial majority (2/3) said they felt as secure or more secure than they did before Tet 1968. From that point on, based on the series of JUSPAO surveys, the people of Saigon, Hue, Danang, Can Tho, and probably the majority of the urban centers in RVN, viewed their aspirations and personal problems mainly in economic terms and their country's problems primarily in terms of achievement of peace.<sup>31/</sup> (Also see Chapter 4)

- (2) Political Instability. Significant political instability developed after the overthrow of the Diem regime. This subject is treated in Chapter 2.
- (3) Lack of a Popular Ideological Issue. The DRV had captured the nationalist cause (See Volume I of this study) and neither President Diem nor his successors were able to establish a broad base of indigenous support.
- (4) Feeling of Abandonment (after the 1973 Peace Treaty was signed). Most former GVN leaders reportedly regard the Paris Peace Agreements of 1973 as the turning point of the war -- "a turning point for the worse."<sup>32/</sup> The Paris Agreements were associated in the minds of GVN leaders with not only violations by the NVA and a lack of US aid and response, but with a feeling that the US had made a drastic strategic realignment in the region and would eventually abandon their cause.

- (5) The Conviction: That the Enemy Would Never Give Up. The frustrations associated with the long protracted struggle and the futility felt by many, coupled with the fatalistic feeling that the enemy would never give up, probably were the "straws" that broke the peoples' will to resist and continue fighting. Although it would be wrong to conclude that in the end the South Vietnamese saw themselves as entirely helpless, they tended to see themselves as being "moved" rather than being "movers."<sup>33/</sup>
- (6) The Struggle Was Only a Piece of a Larger Conflict. The South Vietnamese military and civilian leaders tended to view their war as not simply a conflict between themselves and the DRV but as part of a global struggle between the USSR/PRC on the one side and the US and free world on the other, and many believed that the course of the war and its outcome would depend on events and decisions made in a higher arena (i.e., detente with USSR and rapprochement with the PRC). As a recent study concludes, "the destiny of South Vietnam, in the final analysis, was regarded to have rested in the hands of others--and in this sense was a matter of fate, which, after all, is a concept deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture."<sup>34/</sup>

D. GVN/US INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS

From its inception, the GVN sought to bring about national stability and a measure of law and order to the countryside. President Diem recognized the importance of securing the South Vietnamese countryside from the communist forces, and he introduced a series of programs for that purpose. As forerunners to the larger "pacification plan," which got underway after the Honolulu Conference in 1966, the Civic Action Plan (1955-1956), the Land Development Centers, Agrovillage program (1957-1961), and the Strategic Hamlet projects (1961-1963) were instituted as mechanisms for securing the rural population against the growing threat from the communist insurgents. Most urban areas were considered by the GVN to be

relatively secure at that time, therefore no major urban pacification programs were implemented. Early on, the tendency was for the GVN to deal with the more manageable, exceptional problems as they arose rather than to initiate broad programs and projects for national pacification. Beginning on a piecemeal basis by duplicating the old village defense system, a concept of strategic hamlets took shape and was eventually expanded into a nation-wide network.

1. Objectives

The GVN's primary objective was to exercise control over the population and eventually to pacify the countryside. Over time, the following basic objectives evolved:

- To end the war and restore peace
- To reform the society.<sup>35/</sup>

2. Early VN/US Pacification Efforts

From the establishment of the RVN in 1954 until the Honolulu Conference in 1966, Diem and his successors had implemented a range of government programs intended to provide improved security for the rural population. For several key reasons, most of these programs failed to meet their stated objectives and more importantly, the experience of those earlier GVN-sponsored efforts was to color the peasants' perceptions of any further GVN projects.

a. Broad National Plans

The succession of national programs suggests their trial-and-error nature:

- Reconstruction
- Civic Action
- Land Development Centers and Agrovilles
- Strategic Hamlets
- New Life Hamlets
- Hoc Tap or Rural and Revolutionary Development

These programs were intended to provide security for the rural civilian population so that the agricultural sector could remain viable. Unfortunately, they were implemented with little consideration for

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the needs of the civilian population or likelihood of their acceptance. The development of Agrovillies and Strategic Hamlets which required relocation proved to be extremely unpopular among people who traditionally had derived their strength from the family land and local village associations. GVN programs of that sort demonstrated the insensitivity of the government to the people's needs, contributing to the decline of popular morale. Notwithstanding its initial unpopularity, the Strategic Hamlet program progressed slowly and showed a modicum of success. The slow progress was attributed to the fact that the program did not enjoy large scale US support. General Tran Dinh Tho said that "by the end of 1962, statistics showed that out of a total of 11,864 hamlets, 3,235 had been completed as strategic hamlets and about 34% of the total population was considered as living under GVN protection."36/

The period of instability and turmoil following the assassination of Diem and his brother Nhu is the reason given by many for the eventual termination of the Strategic Hamlet programs. An unfortunate pattern of program failures was developing: the GVN was perceived as the distant governor of a population about which it knew little and cared less (see Figure 6-4).

Introduced in 1964, Hoc Tap (Cooperation) represented another of the major pacification programs. Hoc Tap was a US Embassy Country Team idea, and it was intended as a program to drive the enemy from the seven provinces immediately surrounding Saigon.37/ The following reasons were offered for its failure:

- Poor support by GVN
- Inadequate police forces to insure security
- Ineffective command and control

Throughout the early and mid 1960's, the US attached considerable importance to dissemination of information regarding the GVN's "good intentions."38/ Through such agencies as the United States Information Service and AID the US supported the Vietnamese in developing magazines, newspapers, films, and drama teams, "a kind of native cabaret," all of which were designed to relay to the people the good will of the GVN.



### **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

- PROVIDE SECURITY FOR RURAL POPULACE
- PROTECT LINES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN FARMS, HAMLETS, AND MARKETS
- NEUTRALIZE OR IDENTIFY AND DESTROY COMMUNIST CADRE INFRASTRUCTURE (VCI)
- GAIN SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE GVN
- ESTABLISH A SOUND TAX BASE
- PROVIDE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

### **REASONS FOR PROGRAM FAILURE**

- APPARENT GVN INSENSITIVITY TO POPULAR NEEDS
- CONTINUED DEMORALIZING VC ACTIVITY
- GVN INABILITY TO PROVIDE AND MAINTAIN AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF SECURITY
- POOR SUPPORT OF US EFFORTS BY GVN
- GVN GOOD-WILL CAMPAIGNS CONTRADICTED BY POOR FOLLOW-UP

### **CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE**

- GROWING CYNICISM AMONG SOUTH VIETNAMESE
- GVN FAILURE EXPLOITED BY VC
- GVN TAX AND RECRUITING BASE ERODED
- REDUCED CROPS — INCREASED IMPORTS

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Figure 6-4. Profile of Early Pacification Efforts

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Those efforts toward building popular support for the government were not in themselves sufficient to develop a rural base of support. A long-time observer in Vietnam described the information booths that were built in each hamlet in Quang Nam province in these terms: "They were often poorly located in the hamlet and the posted materials were rarely up-to-date. The condition of the structures suggested to this observer that they were rarely used and little appreciated by the hamlet people. They were empty symbols of deference to external authority."39/

### b. A Personalized Approach--People's Action Team

The People's Action Teams (PATs) developed by the CIA in 1964 served as a successful means for securing villages. PATs were comprised of carefully trained and armed cadres who were to act as village protectors. Generally, groups of about 40 cadres worked locally in their own home districts, thereby giving the program the strong support of the community.

The PATs represented a very successful approach to pacification. That was especially the case when the teams were allied with political groups (e.g., Dai Viet) and hence, could gain support from local political bosses in countering communist insurgent efforts. There were no desertions of PAT cadre. Over a five-month period, three teams killed over 150 armed NLF guerrillas and retrieved their weapons, and more than 200 of the enemy were captured with their weapons - a significant point.40/

### 3. Pacification After the Honolulu Conference

As a result of the Honolulu Conference in 1966, attended by Presidents Johnson and Thieu, the US pledged increased support, and the pacification programs received a much needed boost. By May 1967, all US and GVN pacification activities were incorporated into Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS).41/

#### a. CORDS

The operational element of CORDS was the Revolutionary Development Team (RD) which included security, administrative and cultural cadres. Those teams were developed to consolidate the GVN political

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presence in a hamlet in several ways.<sup>42/</sup> The RD teams were to accomplish the following:

- Provide physical security against NLF guerrilla attacks and intimidation. Over half of the RD team was charged with protecting the team and training the hamlet militia.
- Improve the hamlet administration and widen local participation in political decisions.
- Improve hamlet welfare through the efforts of the new life development unit of the RD team which dealt with the health, land reform, agriculture and the cultural needs of the people.

On paper those efforts appeared sound; in practice, the RD teams encountered inefficiencies and corruption within the administrative system, and many cadres became disillusioned.

If the RD teams uncover inept or corrupt leadership in a hamlet, they often can get it replaced. But if bad administration is traceable to the village or district levels, they often are powerless to effect change. The network of loyalties upward from village officials to district chief--as well as the sometimes conflicting loyalties of district chiefs to corps commanders as well as their immediate superiors, the province chiefs--can impede rational administration and effective use of the RD teams. (Most district as well as province chiefs are military officers).<sup>43/</sup>

Further, the RD teams often encountered resistance and animosity toward their efforts from the Regional Force (RF) and Popular Forces (PF). Often, the RD cadres were put in charge of the para-military troops who were natives of the area in which RD cadres were working. With RD cadre leaders reporting directly to Saigon, by-passing the local governments, the team cadres were identified with the GVN and they often received little cooperation from local administrators and RF/PF troops. BG Tran Dinh Tho, ARVN, describes the situation in 1966/67 when RD cadres had been directed to operate with the RF troops in hamlets and villages, and frequently RD cadres requested support from the RF troops but it was not forthcoming. BG Tho explains that this often stemmed "from the fact that

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RD cadres considered themselves emissaries of the central government, hence superior to the para-military forces, or other cadres, whom they held in low esteem."44/

Further, the success of this program was inevitably dependent upon the individual capabilities and attitudes of the cadres. BG Tho stated that while "some were genuinely devoted and determined in serving the national cause...most...thought only of themselves and avoiding hardship. As a result, the abuse of power for personal benefit and the pursuit of worldly pleasures were widespread."45/ Handicapped by local rivalries, bureaucratic inefficiency, the continual problem of central government intervention in ways that were counterproductive, and communist disruptive strategies the RD program made slow progress in rallying the people in support of the GVN.

### b. The Phoenix Program

Among the important measures introduced by the new pacification program in 1967 was a stepped-up attack on the VCI in the hamlets and villages. The belated realization of the significance of destroying the VCI's political-military apparatus led to the establishment of the Phong Hoang (Phoenix) program. The program was misunderstood by most Americans and became the focus of sensational media treatment.

In short, Phoenix was a US-inspired program designed to pull together all the ongoing, poorly coordinated and ineffective GVN programs against the VCI. Its aim was to improve the collection of information about the VCI, to identify its members, and to conduct operations leading to their apprehension. It was a GVN program for which the US provided advice and financial assistance.

Phoenix enjoyed limited success; however it proved to be badly fragmented. General Abrams appointed a special review group in 1970 to make recommendations on ways to improve the program. A panel conducted their review under the direction of the then CORDS Chief, William E. Colby, and delivered a report which included 27 recommendations for the reform of Phoenix.46/ As a result of this review and earlier interventions, the program experienced some improvement and modest success.

c. Combined Action Platoon (CAP) Program

The CAP program initiated by the US Marines represents a successful civil/military pacification effort in South Vietnam. Established initially in 1965 as the Combined Action program and in 1967 as the Combined Action Platoon, the mission of the CAPs was similar to that of the South Vietnamese Popular Forces and included local recruitment of forces. Major elements of the CAP mission were to:

- Deny the communists their usual recruitment base
- Deny the communists access to rice crops in the region
- Bolster and train the village militia
- Organize and direct defensive combat to protect the populace
- Provide communications and fire support
- Provide basic medical help to villagers.

The key to the success of the program was the fact that the US Marines lived with the PF platoon, thereby assuring the Vietnamese militia and civilians of fire support and reinforcement in the event of a communist attack.<sup>47/</sup> Author Guenter Lewy succinctly described the CAP program:

The marines did not arrive by helicopter in the morning and abandon the people to the mercy of the enemy by evening. In effect they became hostages and demonstrated by their presence that the allies were there to stay. The villagers also recognized that they had acquired a shield against the excessive use of firepower by allied forces, and after gaining confidence in the CAP's capability and staying power they began to provide information on enemy movements.<sup>48/</sup>

Despite the apparent success in gaining the support of the local populations in combatting the communists, Gen. Westmoreland did not expand the program because he felt that there was insufficient US manpower to continue to fight a war in this style. More basically, his notion of the appropriate strategy to employ in South Vietnam did not include the community approach of the CAP program.

d. National Pacification and Development Program

Based on lessons learned through the Strategic Hamlet and the New Life Hamlet programs, the GVN initiated the Rural Development

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program in 1966. This was followed in 1967 by the so-called New Model National Pacification and Development Program. Centralized planning was envisioned for the effort, but there was a lack of coordination between military planners and their civilian counterparts. According to a former commander, the ARVN at that time "still considered pacification a responsibility of the civilians; it claimed to have no part in it since its mission was to conduct mobile operations to destroy the enemy."<sup>49/</sup> In order to provide the necessary support for pacification, the GVN would have to expand, reorganize and train the RF and PF (formerly Civil Guard and People's Militia or Self-Defense Corps, respectively).

The Tet offensive in 1968 caused the GVN to redeploy regular and territorial forces that had been committed to the pacification program. After GVN/US/FWMAF defeated the NLF/NVA attack, the government initiated an Accelerated Pacification Campaign. It was designed to enlarge the extent of GVN control and consolidate the gains won on the battlefield.

In 1969 and 1970, pacification showed significant progress, bringing large numbers of people and territory back under GVN control. In view of the markedly improved situation, the GVN found it appropriate to choose another name for its pacification effort. From 1971 on, it was called the Community Defense and Development Program.

In 1972, the RVNAF, supported by US air power, once again suppressed the enemy's attack; and again full pacification efforts were deferred until after the battle was over and then revitalized under a new title, Community Defense and Local Development. The only differences between the Community Defense and Local Development Program (which ran from 1972 through 1975) and its predecessors were some of the operational procedures, the ever-expanding scale and extent of the efforts, and the increasing contributions in financial assistance and material resources from the US.<sup>50/</sup>

### e. Information and Propaganda Programs

Information and propaganda programs were initiated by the GVN in order to exert a favorable influence on the population by publicizing governmental policies and programs, and to elicit popular support and trust in the GVN.

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Initially, all information and propaganda activities were conducted and coordinated by the GVN Ministry of Information through a system that reached down to village and hamlet. At the province level, there was an information service; at the district level, an information section; and in the villages, an information hall. Prior to 1965, the GVN information and propaganda facilities were limited. In each district town there was only a small information hall, usually adorned with outdated pictures and magazines. Countrywide, there were few trained and experienced information specialists.

A sample of a typical leaflet used by the GVN to win over people in the rural areas is shown at Figure 6-5.

Later, as US involvement in the war increased and the importance of propaganda and psychological operations became more evident, the GVN information and propaganda service greatly expanded with considerable assistance and support from such USG agencies as the US Information Service (USIS) and the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO).

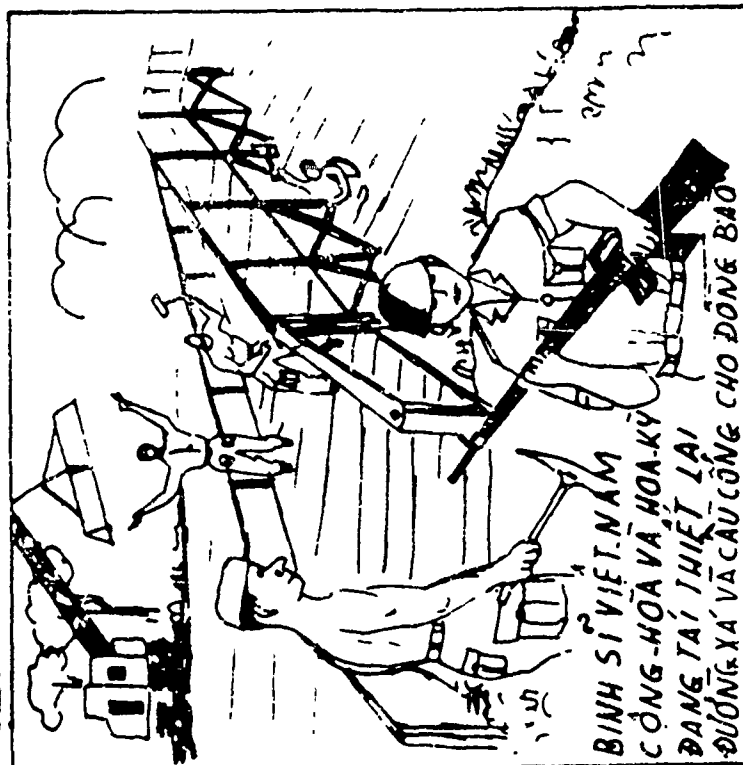
Aided by the US, the GVN eventually found itself in command of a vast array of information and propaganda instruments which were more numerous and sophisticated than those possessed by their enemy. Unfortunately the GVN leadership and their information cadres did not exploit adequately those instruments to produce the desired effects, and despite meager resources, the NLF/PRP appeared to get better results out of their propaganda efforts and often were able to arouse popular sympathy for their cause.

### f. Other Programs

The following programs, which had varying impacts on popular morale and will, were implemented by the GVN (with US support):

- Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program - The Chieu Hoi, or Great National Solidarity program was initiated by the GVN to subvert the morale of enemy cadre and troops and call upon them to leave their ranks and rally to the national cause. The basic theme was that both sides were brothers in the same family and, since both wanted to

CHÍNH PHỦ VINH VÀ HOA-KỲ ĐANG CÙNG  
 NHAU TÁI THIẾT LẠI ĐƯỜNG LÁ VÀ CẦU  
 CÔNG CHO ĐỒNG BÀO. ĐỒNG BÀO HÃY TIẾP  
 TAY VỚI CHÍNH PHỦ BẰNG CÁCH CHỌI BIẾT  
 MỌI HOẠT ĐỘNG CỦA VC ĐỂ CÁC CỎ QUAN  
 CỦA CHÍNH PHỦ TIÊU DIỆT BỌN CHÚNG.  
 6-138-68



CÀNG CHẾT CHÓC VÀ TÀN PHÁ LÃ NHỮNG  
 HÀNH ĐỘNG CỦA VC GIEO RẮC CHO ĐỒNG  
 BÀO MIỀN NAM. BỌN VC KHÔNG ĐÉM XỈA  
 GÌ ĐẾN SINH MẠNG VÀ TÀI SẢN CỦA ĐỒNG  
 BÀO. BỌN CHÚNG ĐANG TUYỆT VỌNG VÀ  
 BỊ QUÂN LỰC VINH ĐÁNH BẠI KHẬP NƠI.

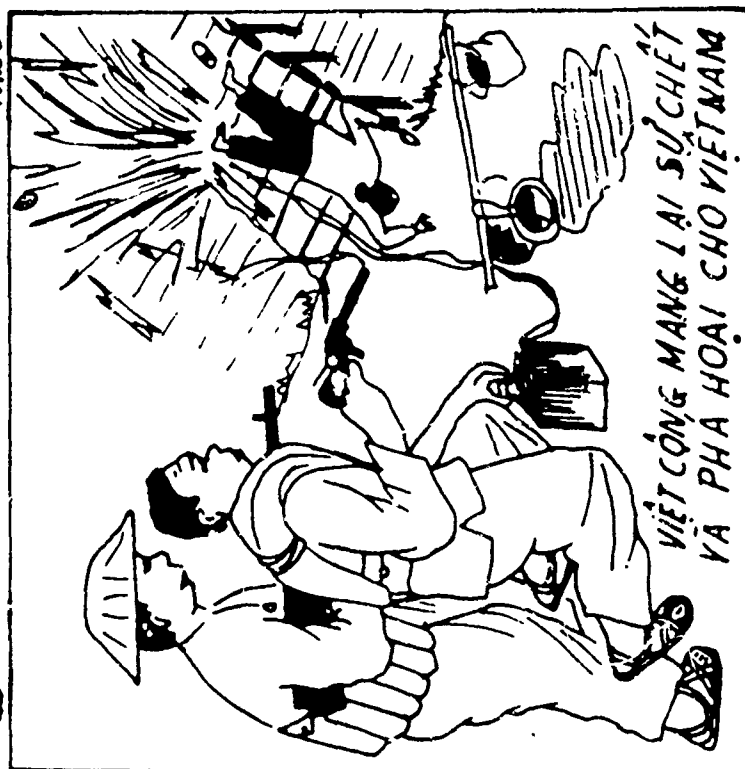


Figure 6-5. A Typical Psychological Operations Leaflet Used by the GVN to Inform Their People of Their Pacification Program

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end the war, the best and least costly way was to renounce bloodshed, forsake hatred, and cooperate with each other to rebuild the shattered nation. From 1963 to 1973, the Chieu Hoi program produced the following results:

- 97,696 Military cadre
  - 45,173 Political cadre
  - 16,872 Others
  - 10,699 Individual weapons
  - 545 Crew-served weapons 51/
- Land-to-the-Tiller Program - A land reform program initiated by the GVN in 1970. Large sections of farmland were redistributed (on a basis of three hectares per farmer) to previously landless farmers. This was one of the most successful of all the GVN programs attempted throughout the war. 52/
  - The People's Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) - The PSDF program 53/ was not intended to be a political or military organization per se, but a true people's organization. With GVN/US assistance in armaments and training, the PSDF were supposed to defend themselves, their families and their property against communist attacks. Starting late, after the 1968 Tet attack, and lacking strong leadership, the PSDF never quite measured up to the government's aspirations.

### E. DEGREE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE WAR EFFORT

Against a background of an extensive NLF/PRP psy-war campaign which included persuasive and coercive means, colored by the numerous GVN/US counter programs, the public support of the South Vietnamese people for their government varied over time.

#### 1. Diem's Years of Rebuilding: 1954 to 1961

By the end of 1955, President Diem was successful in consolidating his regime. He had disarmed the private armies threatening his government, the refugees from the North were being resettled, agricultural

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production was increased, and South Vietnam had achieved a modicum of stability. Urban and rural support for the Diem Government started slowly but showed a steady increase throughout this period. Initially, RVNAF support for Diem was very low, a situation which was aggravated by the forced release of 50,000 men in 1955 because the US would not underwrite a 150,000-man force structure (a decision which the US later reversed).<sup>54/</sup> That support began to increase steadily over time with the influx of US arms, equipment, and training.

Diem's regime appeared well on its way toward creating the kind of new nation that would justify continued US economic and military aid. By late 1958, as a result of Diem's anticommunist campaign, the communist party apparatus in the South had incurred severe losses. In 1959, the communist insurgents elected to step-up their terrorist activity and the Communist Central Committee meeting in the DRV responded by forming the NLF and beginning large-scale infiltration operations.

During this period, popular support for the GVN and the people's morale and will increased steadily, peaking in 1961.

### 2. Downfall of Diem's Regime and Increased US Involvement: 1962 to 1964

President Diem's often arbitrary and authoritarian methods, including wholesale suppression of newspapers critical of his regime, gradually alienated important segments of the urban population. At the same time, Diem lost ground in the countryside by replacing elected village chiefs and councils with his own appointees, who were not always responsive to the interests of the rural population. Notwithstanding Diem's heavy handedness, his greatest support came from the rural and RVNAF sector of the society.

US military involvement increased during the period with the introduction of helicopters and logistical support personnel. The VC greatly increased their terrorist activities throughout the country, and in response the GVN/US began a counterinsurgency program, in which RVNAF forces were not always discriminating in their anti-VC activities; an anti-Diem or anti-Nhu attitude was sufficient cause for arrest.

The crisis which precipitated the downfall of Diem began with a badly handled Buddhist protest demonstration in Hue on 8 May 1963. There followed a series of well-publicized self-immolations by Buddhist monks which shocked the Western world. RVNAF leaders began coup plotting, and eventually overthrew Diem with tacit USG approval. Urban and RVNAF support for the government, which had shown a steady decrease during the period, increased decidedly after the November 1963 coup. Rural support, which had shown modest support for the Diem regime, fell off after his assassination.

See Figure 6-4 for the rationale behind why early GVN/US efforts to win popular support did not achieve the desired results.

3. US Force Build-Up and Major Involvement: 1965 to 1968

Political instability and general inefficiency characterized the GVN's performance in the years immediately following the overthrow of Diem. In addition, RVNAF military actions against increased NLF operations all but ground to a halt. In view of the constantly changing leadership, efforts to develop an efficient administration made no progress at all. NLF control of territory and population was increasing steadily and by the end of 1964 a final collapse had become a distinct possibility. Rural support for the GVN fell drastically, and after a brief increase in support following Diem's overthrow, urban and RVNAF support followed suit.<sup>55/</sup>

In 1965, to meet stepped-up PAVN main force infiltration and increased NLF activity, the US elected to introduce American ground combat forces into the conflict. Within a short time, US and allied forces began to seek out and destroy major NLF/PAVN units employing a strategy of attrition. RVANF was given an opportunity to regroup, re-equip and rebuild. Military pay was doubled by the new Ky-Thieu government in 1965. Morale began to improve and continued to improve throughout the period.

Large-sized US/FWMAF military operations had inflicted heavy casualties on the NLF/PAVN during the period, yet there was no sign of a break in the enemy's morale. The NLF/PAVN situation became somewhat desperate by Tet of 1968 and they elected to launch a major offensive which sacrificed practically all of their NLF insurgents during the all-out attack to gain dominance and to elicit popular support from the South Vietnamese people.

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All segments of the South Vietnamese society showed renewed confidence in the GVN's performance following the victory over the NLF/PAVN forces in the Tet confrontation. The GVN followed the allied combat successes with an intense program of pacification designed to keep the improved public support.

#### 4. Vietnamization and US Force Withdrawal: 1969 to 1973 (Post-Tet Period)

The post-Tet period was characterized by a US decision to upgrade the RVNAF, disengage US combat troops from the war, push for a strategy of population security, and seek a peace agreement with the DRV.

In 1969 and 1970, pacification progressed markedly. As a result, support for the GVN in all sectors showed marked improvement.

A communist main force offensive in 1972 enjoyed early success but it was eventually turned back by victorious RVNAF forces with US air support. Pacification of the countryside had once again been interrupted.

Following protracted peace negotiations with the NLF/DRV, and after several false starts, a ceasefire agreement was signed on 27 January 1973. No sooner had the agreement been signed than North Vietnam started to violate its provisions. Large numbers of troops and supplies were infiltrated into South Vietnam via Cambodia and Laos. US POWs were released and the US completed troop withdrawal in March.

The GVN's popularity in the eyes of its constituents had crested during this period.<sup>56/</sup>

#### 5. The Final Collapse: 1973 to 1975

The GVN continued its complete reliance on the US for military and economic aid during the period. GVN and RVNAF leaders developed feelings of disappointment with the US, even bitterness, over having been "abandoned" by the US because of the Paris Peace Agreements and declining US aid. Notwithstanding their diminishing confidence in the US good will, however, the leaders felt that the US would come to the GVN's rescue in case of real trouble.

Many of the factors listed in Section C above began to have their impact on the South Vietnamese people and the high levels of support which had developed from 1969 through 1973 began to erode.

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When the DRV decided on waging their final offensive against the RVN in the spring of 1975, they knew that their military forces were stronger than those of the RVNAF. The factors outlined in Section C, 5 (Morale and Will of the RVNAF), contributed to the collapse of the RVNAF's morale during that final struggle. The will of the rest of the South Vietnamese population to resist the enemy quickly followed suit. The war was over; it was a complete defeat of the RVNAF and a total collapse of the GVN.

### F. INSIGHTS

The following key insights are derived from an examination of the major influences of South Vietnamese popular morale and will:

- Any program suggested by the US had to gain the support of the GVN and ultimately the people if it was to succeed. Hoc Tap received only token acceptance by the Vietnamese. A further cause of failure of many programs, including Hoc Tap, was the allocation by the GVN of insufficient police and territorial forces necessary to ensure security in the area. That was a serious problem for the programs which required peasants to relocate to Agrovilles or hamlets. Figure 6-4 illustrates the key elements of failure within the early pacification programs and the consequences of such failure. Unfortunately it was on the ashes of previous failures that the new pacification efforts were introduced.
- Professional competence and pride in belonging to an outstanding military organization can be as important as dedication to an ideological cause. For example mercenaries like the French Foreign Legionnaires historically fought extremely well despite being confronted on occasion by heavy odds and a lack of a common political cause; however, they were well led by able and respected officers and lived by the mystique of the Legion. The South Vietnamese soldier, on the other hand, seemed to lack

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dedication to comrades-in-arms, to his leaders, and to a national cause. To sustain the average soldier's effectiveness and combat motivation, he must believe in the legitimacy of his military organization and the political society of which he is a member and which he serves. Despite all attempts to clothe the Thieu regime in a mantle of nationalism and social revolution, the RVNAF soldier's commitment to the worth of the larger political and social system for which he was to risk his life remained weak, and finally collapsed.

- Next to general instability and inferiority in leadership - civil and military - perhaps the gravest shortcoming of GVN and RVNAF was their inability to generate and sustain an adequate level of morale and esprit de corps; the weak leadership was one of the principal causes of this failure.
- The precipitous nationwide decline in South Vietnamese morale and will from the relatively high level which resulted from the eventual defeat of the 1972 Easter offensive, resulted from the widespread belief that they had been abandoned in an untenable position by the only world power that could stave off their defeat.
- Given the prevailing circumstances, it was beyond the capacity of the US, or any other outside power, to impart to the RVNAF a sufficiently high level of morale and will that would enable them to prevail.

### G. LESSON

Morale and will must be generated from within a society; an external power can create, even unintentionally, false and fragile hopes that if dashed will affect adversely these primary characteristics.

CHAPTER 6 ENDNOTES

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7. Ibid., pp. 208-209.
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9. Generals Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, ARVN, The South Vietnamese Society, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History (McLean, VA.: General Research Corp. 1978), pp. 40-41.
10. Ibid., p. 42.
11. General Cao Van Vien and LTG Dong Van Khuyen, ARVN, Reflections on the Vietnam War, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History (McLean, VA.: General Research Corp., 1978), pp. 136-139.
12. General Cao Van Vien, Leadership, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History (McLean, VA.: GRC, 1978), p. 55.
13. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, Reflections on the Vietnam War, pp. 63-64.

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14. Hosmer, et. al., pp. 22-32. A series of BDM interviews elicited comments about President Thieu that give a different picture of him. Ambassador Samuel D. Berger described President Thieu as a "pretty good" leader but one who failed to institutionalize his government in the 1968-1973 period. (Interview 22 June 1979). Former GVN ambassador to the US, Bui Diem, commented that US Ambassador Graham Martin and President Thieu did not understand each other and a great lack of dialogue resulted. (Interview 8 June 1979) Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson (Interview 13 October 1978) described Thieu as a "reasonably able political animal," and Douglas Pike remarked that later (presumably after 1967) under Thieu there was remarkable organization, but it was too late. (Interview 20 November 1978).
15. Lewy, pp. 90-91.
16. Ibid.
17. Hosmer, et al., p. 31; also Sir Robert Thompson speaking at a seminar held at the Royal United Service Institution, 12 February 1969 noted:

On the aid side, the lavishness of the aid caused what might be called a complete demoralization of Vietnamese society. After all, if you have that much money lying around people are bound to try to pick some up. It is all very well saying that the Vietnamese are corrupt, but really they are no worse than anyone else. I would say that the lavishness of the aid to a very large extent corrupted them.

"Lessons from the Vietnam War," Royal United Service Institution, 12 February 1969. Whitehall. (Library Call No. DS557 .A68 L64)

18. Ibid, pp. 54-60, see also Richard Critchfield, The Long Charade: Political Subversion in the Vietnam War (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968). Critchfield focuses on the problem of corruption within RVNAF as an important element leading to the decline of morale and will among the South Vietnamese. He notes that the Dai Viets who comprised much of the leadership within RVNAF were of notoriously corrupt influence. Alfred M. McCoy in his book The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) makes several allegations as to the involvement of selected RVNAF officers in drug trafficking. Several officers were in fact brought to trial for such charges and were found guilty.
19. McMahon, p. 1-5.



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20. Lewy, p. 93. See also BG James Lawton Collins, Jr., Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950 - 1972 Vietnam Studies Series (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1975), pp. 60-63. Collins cites the following contributing factors, determined by several Military Assistance Command studies, to be the principal causes of desertion:
- 1) overly restrictive leave policies,
  - 2) family separation;
  - 3) lack of command attention to personnel management and soldier welfare such as pay, housing, and promotions;
  - 4) general dissatisfaction with military life
  - 5) tolerance of military and civil authorities toward desertion;
  - 6) apparent public apathy toward the war;
  - 7) increasingly heavy combat losses;
  - 8) poor apprehension and punishment of offenders;
  - 9) misuse of certain types of units (especially Ranger and Popular Forces) by higher headquarters
21. William Corson, The Betrayal (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), p. 97. This view is corroborated by General DePuy who in an interview on 24 September 1978 noted that most of the ARVN were not sufficiently "politically" trained and certainly not to the degree that NLF members were trained. Further, there was a great deal of corruption among ARVN leaders.
22. Corson, p. 87.
23. Lewy, pp. 170-175. According to a captured PAVN reconnaissance platoon leader (1968), North Vietnamese soldiers received no pay while in RVN. Their families were provided food by the DRV while they were away. Only intelligence cadres were given South Vietnamese piasters for penetration operations in the cities. Regular pay when in the North amounted to the equivalent of 600 GVN piasters for a private, 1,200 for a sergeant, and 6,500 for a second lieutenant (paid in DRV money but converted here to the GVN value in piasters at about 180 piasters to the US dollar. A Monograph of 2LT Nguyen Van Thong, Platoon Leader, Recon Co., 320th Regiment, 1st NVA Division. Written by Major Billy J. Biberstein, Commanding Officer, 13th Military History Detachment, from interviews with Lt Thong, interrogation reports, I FFORCEV G2 Daily INTSUMS and the paper "A day in the life of an NVA soldier in South Vietnam" prepared by the I FFORCEV G2 Section, p. 3. The ARVN soldier received about 16,000 piasters (\$88 US). In 1971 USAID recommended an across-the-board increase of 28% per month or some 4,500 piasters for combat troops and 2,000 piasters for Regional forces mobile battalions. See Collins, Development and Training, pp. 91-92.

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24. Corson, p. 87, also Nguyen Cao Ky in his book Twenty Years and Twenty Days (New York: Stein and Day, 1976) comments on the corruption of RVN local officials. Too often widows were forced to agree to give half their husbands' death benefits to corrupt officials in order to receive any portion of the benefits.
25. General Cao Van Vien, Leadership, p. 60.
26. Corson, p. 102.
27. Lewy, p. 178.
28. W. C. Westmoreland, General, USA, "Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964 - June 1968," in CINCPAC/COMUSMACV Report on the War in Vietnam (As of 30 June 1968) (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1968), p. 211.
29. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
30. Hosmer, et al., pp. 60-61.
31. Based on the following documents prepared by the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), Saigon, Vietnam, Office of Policy Plans and Research (Note: These documents were originally classified or for Official Use Only, but they have since been declassified):

National Urban Public Opinion Highlights -- January 1966

JUSPAO Analysis of Mich Survey on Social Problems in Saigon -- July 1966

JUSPAO Research Reports on "Saigon Public Attitudes as Expressed in Sample Survey(s) . . ." Conducted in January, March, April and May 1969.

JUSPAO Survey, Saigon Public Opinion Surveys conducted in September 1970 and January 1971.

JUSPAO Surveys on Public Opinion in Qui-Nhon, October 1970; Dalat, November 1970; and Can Tho, February 1971.

32. Hosmer, et al., p. 5.
33. Ibid., p. 130.

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34. This view was expressed by a number of military and civilian leaders. It cannot be said to be the view of the South Vietnamese population as a whole, for the people were concerned more with issues of the economy and security rather than with such global machinations.
35. General Trinh Dinh Tho, ARVN, Pacification, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for Department of the Army, Office of Chief of Military History, (McLean, VA.: General Research Corp., 1977) p. 19.
36. Generals Hinh and Tho, The South Vietnamese Society, p. 39. See also Volume V Chapter 5 of this study for detailed evaluation of US/GVN pacification efforts.
37. Douglas Blaufarb, The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance, (London: Collier Macmillan Publishing, 1977), p. 222.
38. Ibid., p. 221.
39. Ibid., p. 221-222.
40. Peer de Silva, Sub Rosa, (New York: New York Times Books 1978), p. 238.
41. Lewy, p. 123.
42. John C. Donnel, "Pacification Reassessed," Asian Survey, August 1967, pp. 567, 568. See also Volume V, Chapter 5 of this study for a comprehensive review of CORPS, its evolution and functioning.
43. Ibid., p. 575.
44. Trinh Dinh Tho, Pacification, p. 176.
45. Ibid., p. 177.
46. MACV, Command History, 1970, II:VIII-48-54. William E. Colby, "Internal Security in South Vietnam - Phoenix," December 1970.
47. General Westmoreland provides general remarks on the CAP program in his book A Soldier Reports, pp. 166 and 216. In an interview with the BDM study team, General Westmoreland reflected that it was a good program, that the cost (in US personnel) was too high, and the Vietnamese had too much of a crutch in the continued presence of a Marine squad. He told LTG Lewis W. Walt, III MAF commander, that the duration of stay for a CAP should be limited. BDM interview with General Westmoreland on 17 August 1979.

48. Lewy, p. 116.
49. Thanh Dinh Tho, Pacification, p. 151.
50. Ibid., p. 192.
51. Ibid., p. 134. Speaking to a group of educators at the School of International Studies, University of Denver in October 1965, John Paul Vann (former Army officer who returned to Vietnam in 1965 with the AID program) discussed his interpretation of Chieu Hoi statistics. "I personally interviewed about 200 Chieu Hoi. I did not personally interview a single Chieu Hoi who came back for a positive reason - he came back because of the bombing, the small VC pay, the hardships of separation from family . . . but not one came in because he said he wanted to be a member of the GVN." Mr. Vann's presentation at the University of Denver was arranged for by Dr. Vincent Davis, who made a tape recording available to The BDM study team for purposes of this study.
52. Ibid., pp. 140-144.
53. Ibid., pp. 150-155.
54. General Dong Van Khuyen, ARVN, RVNAF, Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program. Prepared for the Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, (McLean, VA.: General Research Corp, 1978), pp. 8-10. Nevertheless, as John Paul Vann noted in his lecture before the School of International Studies, University of Denver, on 7 June 1966, "The basic problem is lack of basic support." Vann spoke of the feeling among some segments of the population that a communist victory was inevitable. Certainly this early acceptance of what seemed to some to be inevitable made all the more difficult the US/GVN task of building popular support for the GVN and of improving the morale and will of the population to counter communist efforts in the area.
55. Stanley Andrews in an article "Red Tape and Broken Promises" described the reasons for the apparent apathy among villagers for US/GVN efforts to pacify the rural areas:

The villagers certainly were not helpful in passing on what they knew about Vietcong activities, even in the so-called pacified areas. . . One explanation the villagers give for their behavior is that they are weary of all the shooting and shouting that has been going on, in one form or the other, for nearly twenty years; another is that if they stop their work and look up at a helicopter, the Vietcong will mark them as American sympathizers and harrass them; and if they run for

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cover, the Americans will take them for Vietcong and shoot them down. I got the impression that except for the larger landowners (fifty acres is a big holding), the struggle for sheer survival is stronger than any loyalty to government or ideology.

See Stanley Andrews, "Red Tape and Broken Promises," in Vietnam: Why, A collection of Reports and Comment from The Reporter (New York: The Reporter 1966), p. 43.

56. Laurence E. Grinter in his well documented article "South Vietnam: Pacification Denied," South East Asian Perspective, July 1975 writes of the problems the GVN faced in trying to gain the support of the people:

But between 1968 and 1973 the GVN's pacification and development programmes achieved successes because priority was finally given to protecting and involving the people in their own defense, and policies of economic redistribution were promoted. Yet overall, the record now proves that the Saigon authorities never fashioned a political community in South Vietnam (p. 68).

CHAPTER 7  
CONSTRAINTS ON RVN POLICY

Nguyen Van Thieu was then forced [by drastic cuts in US aid] to fight a poor man's war.

Senior General Van Tien Dung, PAVN, 1976 1/

...[The Paris Agreement] practically bound the RVN hands by one-way legalistic constraints and by severing the lifesustaining line with the US while enhancing the enemy prestige and allow [ing] him [DRV] to strengthen his forces in complete freedom.

Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, ARVN, 1976 2/

A. INTRODUCTION

From its tentative and feeble beginning until its sudden and violent collapse, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) was faced with a series of significant constraints which limited its freedom of action and effectiveness. These "contradictions" - to use the communists' terminology - were political, social, psychological, economic, geographic and military. Some were inherent in the society and environment but others were self-imposed. Many were created by its enemies, while a number were dictated by its major ally and provider. During its short but volatile history, the RVN, with the help of the US, overcame many of these constraints, but in the process sometimes created others; several critical limitations remained intractable.

This chapter presents a number of topics, most of which describe our inability to assist the Government (or Governments) of South Vietnam in mobilizing fully and employing effectively their human and material resources to solve their internal and external problems. The issue of whether the key problems were solvable or not will be addressed throughout the study.

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Due to the almost total dependence of the RVN on the US for moral, physical, and financial support, these constraints on the US Government which restricted options in Southeast Asia almost automatically became constraints on GVN policy. Because of the vast disparity of power between the countries, and the relative magnitude of the threat to the partners, fairly minor restrictions on US policy often became major obstacles to GVN's freedom of action.

In order to appreciate the full range of internal and external forces which impeded GVN, it was necessary to reintroduce matters discussed in the other chapters of this volume (and indeed even some factors which will be analyzed further in yet other volumes). In effect then, this chapter will serve the additional purpose of providing an expanded summary of the volume, as well as a sneak preview of insights to be developed in more detail in later papers.

Since the majority of the constraints involved were dynamic, they will be analyzed in a time-phased sequence. Some of the many forces impinging on GVN were more powerful and thus more restrictive than were others; this factor of relativity will be emphasized at the conclusion of each time period reviewed.

Figure 7-1 displays the various types of forces which affected both the GVN and RVNAF.

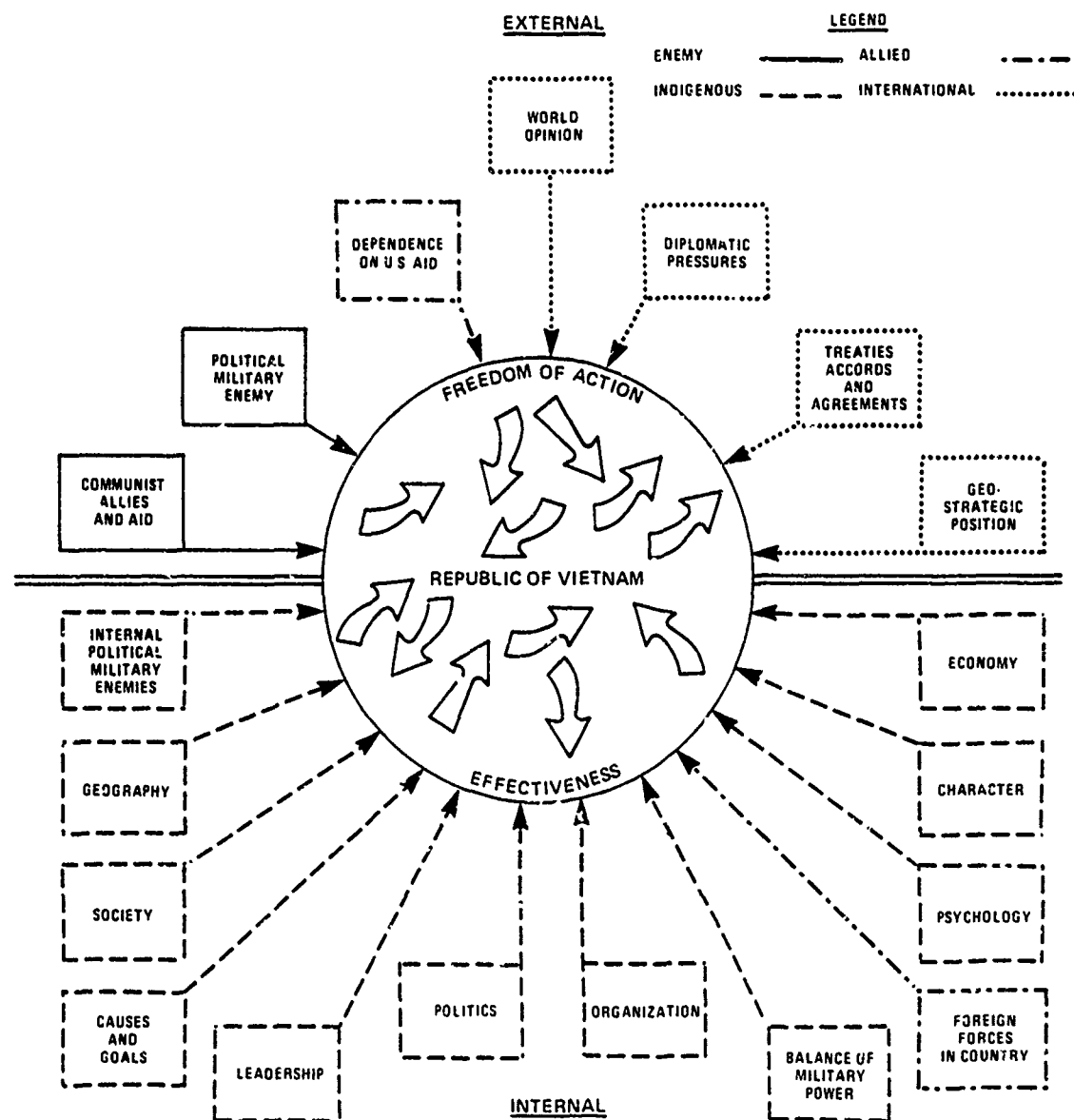
### B. IN THE BEGINNING: 1954 - 1960

#### 1. The Geneva Accords

The negotiators at the 1954 Geneva Conference did not intend to set up a permanent and independent nation-state in South Vietnam. Their concept was to create two "zones", divided roughly along the 17th parallel, in order to let passions cool, to permit negotiations for reunification, and to facilitate the relocation and separation of hostile forces -- the French and Catholic Vietnamese in the South, the Viet Minh in the North. Similar "temporary" arrangements had been imposed on Germany and Korea at the end of World War II with less-than-ideal results.

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## RESTRAINTS ON GVN AND RVNAF FREEDOM OF ACTION AND/OR EFFECTIVENESS



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NOTE: The arrows in the center of this figure (and the similar ones for 1955, 1965, and 1975) represent the volatile nature of the RVN (its people, government, armed forces, etc.) created by the impact of the numerous constraints which limited both freedom of action and effectiveness.

Figure 7-1. Types of Constraints on RVN Policy



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Head of State Bao Dai and his government had little influence at Geneva and never agreed to the Accords, which placed severe restrictions on their ability to govern, and even raised the basic question of legitimacy. The appointed Premier, Ngo Dinh Diem and his fledgling government faced many formidable obstacles; most experts thought them to be insurmountable, and old Indochina hands were pessimistic:

- The Accords, while not legally binding on the RVN, placed it in an international fishbowl and on the moral and psychological defensive. The composition of the International Control Commission (Canada, India & Poland) insured that the orientation of that body would have a predictable "tilt" towards the communists (at least until the PRC attacked India), and also that it would be ineffective and powerless. The proviso for "free" elections in 1956 was equivalent to a ticking time bomb in Saigon. Diem temporarily defused this booby trap after the 1955 referendum resulted in the ouster of Bao Dai and Diem's election as President. (Even in the unlikely event that Diem would have permitted truly free elections in his zone, he was doomed to defeat because the northern zone had 2 million more people than did the South, plus the fact that Ho Chi Minh was a loved and respected patriot to most Vietnamese. The Vietminh also had an unbeatable edge in the arena of nationalism.) Diem announced that since there could never be really free elections in Viet Minh-controlled areas in both zones, there would be none at all. This decision provided the DRV and later the NLF with a powerful propaganda weapon which they employed effectively, both locally and internationally, until the final collapse of the RVN two decades later.
- The restriction on the number of US and French advisors permitted in RVN limited their ability to evaluate and improve the capabilities of the newly created RVNAF. The amounts and types of military equipment which could be furnished to the RVN were also prescribed in detail. These limitations were not a major factor during this period, however.

2. Social and Psychological

The societies of the three regions of Vietnam - Cochin China, Annam, and Tonkin - were and still are different due to the chances of history, geography, climate and external influences. Although they have much in common there are distinct and discernable differences.

The society of Cochin China (roughly the Mekong Delta and the Saigon/Cholon region) was the most heterogeneous and volatile by the time Diem was elected as President of RVN. Cochin China was the last area occupied by the Vietnamese during their historical "March to the South" from the Red River, which was begun by Emperor LeLoi in the 15th Century and lasted almost 200 years. This conquest brought them into conflict with both the Kingdoms of Khmer and Siam. By 1954 there were 350,000 to 700,000 or so Khmers (Cambodians) living within the boundaries of the new RVN. The 17th Parallel Demarcation Line divided Annam (Central Vietnam), thus placing the old imperial capital of Hue in the RVN as well as about 500,000 to 700,000 mountain people of about two dozen tribal groupings; only about 50,000 Chams (original inhabitants of Annam) still survived. Cochin China was ruled by the French for 90 years as a colony. Annam and Tonkin had a more elevated status as "protectorates"; the latter was controlled by the French for about 70 years. The French built Saigon (Paris of the Orient) adjacent to the Chinese trading village of Cholon. When the RVN was declared a sovereign state by President Diem, there were about 1,000,000 ethnic Chinese in South Vietnam, located primarily in Cholon.<sup>3/</sup>

Traditional Vietnamese society, heavily influenced by Chinese culture, Confucianism, and Taoism, preached and practiced loyalty to family, village, and the emperor (later, state). French rule, and particularly their imposed economic system, diluted these traditional values. "The peasantry, once almost self-sufficient, had come to depend on the landowners, the Chinese merchants, the French administrators, and the fluctuations of the international rice market."<sup>4/</sup> With the basis of their usefulness and authority restricted by this radically different economic system, the village governments lost a good deal of their hold over the people.

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New and dynamic religious/political cults, the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, "...offered first a means of reestablishing the spiritual communion between man, heaven and earth that the French, with their abstract finances and their secular bureaucracy had swept away."<sup>5/</sup> The French armed and advised these anticommunist sects, during their war with the Viet Minh in order to free regular troops for the tougher fights in North and Central Vietnam. When the French moved in, most of the local mandarins fled north. A "new elite" had to be selected and educated to serve as mid-level managers and bureaucrats. Many of them became Roman Catholics and aped the French way of doing things, even to their mannerisms. This was also true of the quite small but very rich and powerful band of landowners. The ethnic Chinese merchants and bankers, as usual, bent with the wind but maintained their cultural identity and made money.

The tribes in the highlands didn't like or trust the Vietnamese and vice versa. The French called these rather primitive people "Montagnards", or mountain people and granted them relative autonomy, while the lowland Viets, who traditionally hated and feared the mountains and jungle, called them "Moi" or savage. The French also imposed an uneasy peace between the Vietnamese and the Khmers in the delta, but had merely patched over the historic hatred between them. (Since 1975 it has resurfaced quite savagely.)

Psychologically there were significant differences between the "average" Northerner and his Southern cousin. These distinguishable traits evolved over time due to the differences in climate, terrain, and historical development. Partially because of their more benign, though quite humid, climate their fertile rice lands and fewer people per tilled acre, the Southerners developed into more fun loving, extravagant, and less cohesive people. On the other hand the "average" Northerner had the reputation of being hard-working, frugal, disciplined, and humorless.<sup>6/</sup>

The ethnic Vietnamese from the center (Annam) also displayed distinctive characteristics. Like the Tonkinese, they had been under French rule for a generation less than had the Cochinese. In addition

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the Emperor, through his mandarins, was permitted to continue at least nominal rule of this "Protectorate".

As a group the inhabitants ... are more engaged with traditional Confucian values than are those of the Southern provinces...[and] tend to distrust their Southern compatriots as persons who adapt too readily to foreign influences...7/

In 1954 the public mood, especially in the cities and among the elite, was one of uncertainty in the South. Many of these people had actively supported the French and they were susceptible to charges of being lackeys and antinationalists; this charge, spoken or implied, easily led to feelings of self-doubt and even guilt among many of them. The refugees, of course, were homesick and confused. The sects really didn't trust anyone, the Viet Minh, the French or the new government in Saigon. The psychological climate in the new republic was far from encouraging, and presented Diem with one of his many formidable challenges. This fragmentation of the society of RVN resulted in a large number of special interest and pressure groups that placed limits on his freedom of action.

### 3. Political and Economic 8/

If the social/psychological environment in South Vietnam was bad in 1954, the political situation was even worse. The French-appointed head of state, ex-Emperor Bao Dai, had no real empathy with "his people" nor they with him. Although he disliked Ngo Dinh Diem, he reluctantly appointed the self-exiled Diem as his Premier. Bao Dai spent most of his time and energies on the French Riviera; this was probably a gratuitous bonus for Diem. After the October 1955 Plebiscite, Diem was established as President of the new Republic and Bao Dai continued in retirement - this time officially and permanently.

If ever there was a quagmire in South Vietnam, it was the political morass that greeted Diem when he set foot in Saigon in July 1954 after a four-year absence. His power base was practically non-existent. The French still retained a great deal of political, economic and military power and they resented his anti-French attitude and his open support from the US. One of the major political handicaps facing Diem and all of his

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successors was the fact that the Viet Minh had "captured" the mantle of nationalism; over the years, through a combination of cleverness and ruthlessness the Lao Dong Party was able to divide, discredit or eliminate all potential nationalistic competitors.

The National Army was weak, dispirited and disorganized. The Chief of the General Staff, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Hinh, was appointed by Bao Dai and was openly pro-French and disloyal to Diem. The armed "river pirate" sect, the Binh Xuyen, with the blessings of both Bao Dai and the French, controlled the gambling, prostitution, and most of the police in Saigon-Cholon; Bao Dai received handsome payments for the franchise. Most of the delta was under control of the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai, or the Viet Minh staybehinds.

The background and characteristics of Ngo Dinh Diem and his family were crucial in the formative years of RVN. Their strengths were sufficient to bring more than a degree of order and progress out of the chaos of the mid-1950s, but their weaknesses - which were magnified by the multiple pressures - eventually led to their overthrow and the near anarchy of the mid-1960s. Diem was also disliked and distrusted by many Cochinese, including landlords, because he was both Catholic and from Central Vietnam. Nor did Diem even come close to having the charisma, the popularity, or the organizational ability of Ho Chi Minh, who was the only Vietnamese "patriot" known and respected from the Chinese border to the Gulf of Siam. Diem had other serious shortcomings which adversely affected his popularity and the efficiency of his government, e.g., his unwillingness and inability to delegate responsibility and especially authority; his distrust of all foreigners including the Americans; his suspicion of his senior military officers (with growing justification over time); his inability to accept advice or criticism; his gradual withdrawal from reality under pressure with a corresponding increasing dependence on his family, etc. About all he had to his credit were his honesty, dedication, sincerity, hard work, his reputation for being anti-French and anticommunist, and above all his support by the US.

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Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was given the vague title of Political Counselor, but as Diem became more withdrawn, Nhu assumed more and more power and prerogatives. He was bright, articulate, ambitious, xenophobic, devious, secretive, and ruthless; many of the means and methods he employed were near carbon copies of those employed by the communists. He exercised tight control of a number of power bases to include the Can Lao Party, the Republican Youths, the secret police, and the US-trained and equipped Special Forces. Late in this period, he exercised personal control of the Strategic Hamlet Program and also the unpopular measures taken to counter the Buddhist militants. He and his wife, who was beautiful, strong-willed and also ruthless, were the most feared and hated public figures in RVN, especially among the urbanites. Madame Nhu wielded substantial power even outside her private domain of women's groups and social/moral issues.

Approximately 900,000 refugees from the North, mostly Catholics, had to be settled and assimilated in a region then containing about 12 million. This was no mean task for a weak, inexperienced and impoverished government. In comparison, this would be the equivalent of over 16 million immigrants entering the United States in less than a year. RVN also was faced with the deplorable condition of the economy and the transportation network after eight years of war. Although the fighting was less severe in the South than it was in either Central or North Vietnam, massive amounts of US aid were required to prop up the economy then and throughout the 20 years of the Republic; except for food, rubber, and timber the South was seriously short of basic raw materials, while the reverse was true in the North. The lack of adequate civil and military leadership, both as to quantity and especially quality, was a problem that was recognized early and ameliorated somewhat over time but which was never solved. Unfortunately, the new GVN leadership was basically city-bred, many of them Northern Catholics; while that of the Viet Minh and later the Viet Cong primarily came from the rural majority. Large scale corruption was endemic. To compound this problem the VC, early on, singled out the more effective GVN officials as priority targets for intimidation, kidnapping, or assassination; tens of thousands were thus neutralized during the course of the war.

In the early years of his regime, Diem fairly earned laudatory comments in the US for producing both political and economic "miracles" when conventional wisdom had predicted failure and collapse. His enemies, particularly the indigenous Viet Minh cadre recognized that he was the main threat to their long range plans and even their survival. They initiated measures which took account of the internal contradictions and constraints prevailing in the South and gradually exposed their veneer of the "miracles". The long term odds were thus heavily stacked against the survival of Diem and his government. With U.S. advice and assistance, the latter readily accepted but the former often disregarded, Diem slowly built a shaky and shifting power base. His main appeal was to the anticomunists, refugees, Catholics, and the secret Can Lao party headed by his brother Nhu. The Chinese merchants favored him as long as he could provide stability and a minimum of governmental control. He was relatively secure if he controlled or neutralized his generals and continued to receive U.S. economic and military aid.

4. The Enemy

The RVN had more than enough political, economic, and social problems and shortcomings to test severely their weak and inexperienced government, even without internal and external threats to their security. The increasingly severe security problems made it difficult for Diem's government to resolve satisfactorily the other festering critical issues.

Diem's first major security decision was to gain control of his own capital. Initially, the French interposed themselves politically and even physically, between Diem's army and the criminal Binh Xuyen faction, but had to back down under US pressure. The army performed better than many experts predicted. After completely crushing the riverpirates, Diem took similar steps to neutralize the more powerful and popular Hoa Hao and Cao Dai. That objective was achieved following some sharp fighting and negotiating, although the sects remained as strong religious and political bodies. Eventually, the majority of the Hoa Hao allied themselves with the government to oppose the rapidly growing threat posed by the Viet Cong. The faction-ridden Cao Dai, however, did not join up until after the overthrow and murder of Catholic Diem.

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Battle successes significantly increased the morale and prestige of the government's military forces. The victories also created a reputation for and mystique around their field commander, Gen. Duang Van "Big" Minh that lasted until the final days of the Republic. This turn of events also made him a potential rival to Diem, so Minh was gradually isolated from direct command of troops.

During the war against the French Union Forces, the Viet Minh were never as strong in the South as they were in North and Central Vietnam because of the diffused and less receptive political environment plus the distance from the source of supplies and leadership. Nevertheless, the Southern Viet Minh had leadership, organization, weapons, discipline, combat experience, fairly secure local base areas and a credo. That combination of assets far outweighed their lack of numbers.

About 15,000 Viet Minh had remained in the South in 1954 and provided the nucleus for the hard-core political and military cadres of the Lao Dong Party (South) and later of the National Liberation Front (NLF) and People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). The South Vietnamese Government lumped the NLF and the PLAF together and collectively labeled them by the derogatory term Viet Cong (VC) or Vietnamese Communists. Diem feared this potentially dangerous nucleus and so conducted a series of psychological and military "anti-Communist" offensives. Through surrender, desertion, capture, or death these stay-behinds were seriously depleted by 1959. Unfortunately the too often indiscriminate and harsh methods employed by Diem's police and troops hurt a substantial number of innocent people and helped create a favorable climate for an insurgency. The 90,000-odd Viet Minh who did go north received intensive indoctrination and training and were infiltrated back into the South, first gradually and then steadily. From 1959 through 1964 they were an invaluable asset to the DRV in fueling and fanning the insurrection in RVN. (After that pool of men had been drained, North Vietnamese soldiers in increasing numbers were required to sustain and expand the conflict, both as replacements for PLAF units and as integral North Vietnamese Army (NVA)--or Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN)--units.)



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In 1960, Bernard Fall outlined in Street Without Joy how the NLF was beginning to repeat the successful tactics of Mao and Ho by "strangling" the cities from the countryside; besides hurting the economy this mode of war tended to discomfort and discredit the government. Relatively few dedicated guerrillas were able to tie down many times their number in static security missions.

The regular army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was built around the Viet Minh veterans who had soundly defeated the French Union Forces at Dien Bien Phu and in many other battles. It was much larger, more experienced, and better trained, equipped and led than were the scattered Viet Minh units remaining in South Vietnam; it was also justly proud. Thus it posed a much more serious threat to the RVN. Although the nature of this external threat was incorrectly assessed initially by the Americans, with serious consequences, it could not be ignored; over ten years later, it became a reality.

The eventual combination of the unconventional (NLF) and the conventional (PAVN) threats were well beyond the capacity of the RVN to contain, let alone to overcome without major assistance from external sources.

### 5. Geo-Strategic Position

The Republic of Vietnam was forced to operate from an inferior geo-strategic posture throughout its existence, a situation which increasingly worsened.

The thousand-odd miles of border was located for the most part along jungle-covered mountains. The coastline was even longer. The threat of a direct conventional attack across the relatively short Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) by the PAVN always existed, but did not become a reality until the Easter offensive of 1972. Even so, the mountainous western portion of the DMZ was regularly used by infiltrating bodies. Some PAVN units had remained in eastern Laos after the 1954 ceasefire, providing them with the often-used capability of out-flanking any defense established south of the DMZ and of infiltrating men and supplies into the north and center of RVN. When the eastern slice of Cambodia came under NLF and later PAVN control,

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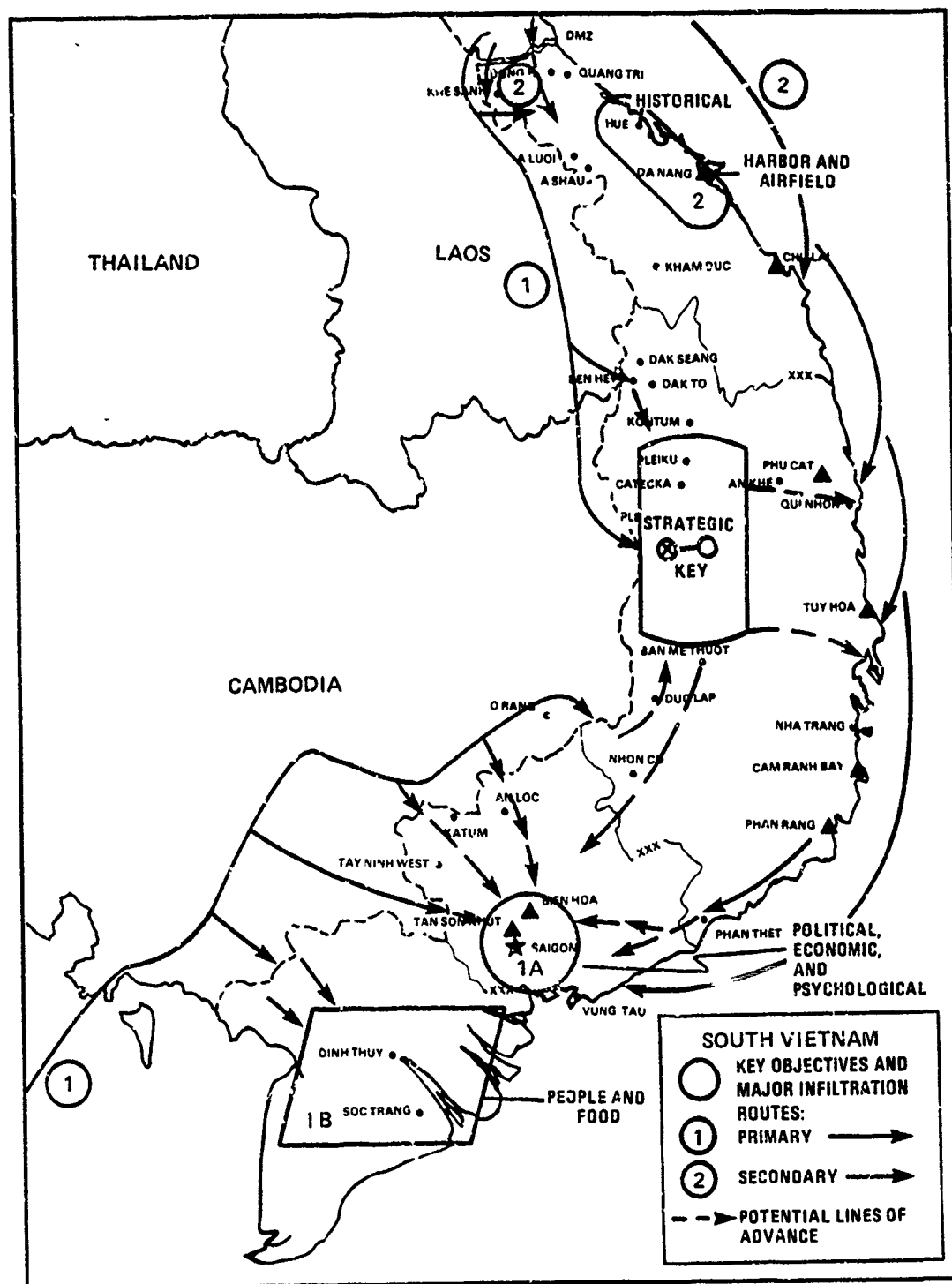
the "heart and mind" of RVN, Saigon, was threatened directly and continuously, as was her populous "breadbasket," the Mekong Delta.

The major strategic objectives in RVN were from first to last, Saigon and the Delta. (There were secondary ones such as Hue - history and culture, plus Da Nang and Cam Ranh - ports and airfields.) The strategic fulcrum, however, was located in the sparsely settled Central Highlands and was centered on the Plateaus of Darlac and Kontum. Control of these areas provides an attacker with the opportunity to strike east and cut RVN in half. The Plateaus also provide access to Saigon from the north and northeast. The Viet Minh, later the NLF, and finally the PAVN fought hard to establish and maintain strong positions in the Highlands. The aftermath of the surprise seizure of Ban Me Thuot by NVA units in March 1975, provided proof of the strategic worth of this area. (See Map 7-1).

Any well organized and led insurgency places a tremendous burden on the government under attack. Any government's first duty is to provide for the needs and the security of the governed. This dictates that food and other necessities be produced, transported, and distributed, and that the people be protected - day and night - in their homes, fields, and on the streets. The ideal would be to protect everything and everyone all of the time -- a physical and financial impossibility.

The scope of the security problem facing RVN was complicated by the geography: the mountains, jungles, rivers, canals, and swamps severely restricted movement. This dilemma was further complicated by a barely adequate, vulnerable, and war-damaged transportation network. Unfortunately these basic facts of life too often have been often forgotten or overlooked. They underpin the rationale for the traditional and popular "rule of thumb": ten government soldiers for each guerrilla. (Historically this ratio has been as high as 40 to one or even more.)

When a country must be defended against both widespread insurgency and major overt attacks by conventional forces, the strategic problem facing the incumbent government is more than doubled. The government's dilemma is that in order to protect people and things, one must disperse one's forces and assign them relatively static, territorial missions. But



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Map 7-1. Key Strategic Objectives in RVN, and Routes

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in order to counter the conventional forces (and/or the mobile "main force units" built up over time during a classic insurgency) one must move and concentrate swiftly. The security problem is even more formidable because insurgents and invaders generally possess the initiative as to when, where and how to strike. Although the conventional mode was not employed by the enemy during this time period the threat did exist and had to be considered.

The precarious geo-strategic position of the newly established RVN was exacerbated by the accelerated withdrawal of the final units of the 140,000-man French Expeditionary Corps in early 1956; they had been counted on to deter or contain the overt threat.

### 6. The Military 9/

After the regroupment in 1954, the Vietnamese National Army in the South numbered about 200,000 men. Many of these soldiers had fought well as individual members of French units. Others had been formed into Vietnamese battalions and trained for the most part by the French; there were over 150 of these units. A number of battalions and even two Groupments Mobile (equivalent of the US Brigade) were commanded by Vietnamese officers.

The US Military Advisory Assistance Group unilaterally decided to support a force of only 100,000 men; this was later changed to 150,000. Because of numerous desertions during the relocation, all units were understrength; nevertheless several thousand combat-experienced NCO's were forced out of the service. The original US-supported force structure of the Army of South Vietnam (ARVN) consisted of four field divisions (each 8,100 men), six light divisions (each 5,800 men), several independent infantry and territorial regiments, plus smaller combat and support units. A separate but small Air Force (VNAF), a Navy (VNN), and even a Marine Corps (VNMC) were created; collectively the four services were titled the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).

Concerned with the threat of an overt invasion by the large battle-hardened Viet Minh units in North Vietnam, MAAGV experimented with several types of organizations. In 1959 they settled on a standard type of

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infantry division of 10,450 men. The US experience in World War II and in organizing and training the South Korean Army heavily influenced the decision to create a conventional type force. Although the new ARVN division was light (by our standards) in transportation and in firepower (initially only one light artillery and one heavy mortar battalion per division), it was too cumbersome in bulk and tactics to cope effectively with the elusive and mobile PLAF units. The creation of this division insured the further neglect and decline of the important territorial forces. There was serious disagreement within the US mission in Saigon as to the wisdom of this course of action, but the issue was settled when Washington supported the MAAGV. Diem recognized this shortcoming and against the advice of MAAGV, he formed 65 independent antiguerrilla (Ranger) companies in 1960. He obtained the manpower for this force of about 10,000 men, by deactivating the 4th rifle company of each existing infantry battalion. Belatedly, late in 1960, MAAGV decided to support and help train these ARVN Rangers.

The morale and combat effectiveness of the old Vietnamese National Army organizations were, on the whole, lower than those of comparable Viet Minh units. They were labeled by the latter as French puppets, just as the NLF and PLAF subsequently tagged the RVNAF as puppets of the "US-Diem clique." As mentioned earlier, their victories over the three sects raised their esprit and self-confidence, but this improved condition was too soon reversed by poor leadership and successive defeats at the hands of the PLAF.

The French retained control of the RVNAF logistical system up to their final withdrawal in April 1956. This permitted them to select and ship to Algeria the best equipment available in the country, including much provided by the US. As the pace of the French withdrawal accelerated, they began to inundate the RVNAF with obsolete and damaged equipment, much of it without spare parts or repair equipment. Not only were RVNAF units poorly equipped, but they were practically untrained in logistics except at the lower skill levels.

The French had lost and were gone; now MAAGV assisted RVNAF to organize, train, support and fight with US equipment and according to US

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doctrine and tactics from the individual soldier up through division level. This would have been a difficult enough mission for all parties involved even if the armed sects and the Viet Cong had remained quiescent.

The language barrier impeded this massive endeavor. Few Americans could speak French fluently and practically none spoke Vietnamese. The number of English-speaking Vietnamese, even though they soon started to multiply geometrically, was always short of the increasing demand.

From its inception, RVNAF was infiltrated by NLF agents and sympathizers. Since this was also true of most GVN agencies, it was always difficult, and often impossible, to maintain secrecy or to attain surprise.

RVNAF was consistently faced with a manpower shortage. The North contained at least two million more people than did the South and had a far superior system and discipline for mobilizing and employing their manpower. Areas under control of the NLF and those hotly contested by both sides provided little manpower to RVNAF. (Incredibly, GVN did not decree total mobilization until after Tet '68!) The high desertion and draft evasion rates were serious manpower problems which were never solved; usually there was a loss of 20 percent or more of the force each year. Most RVNAF, especially ARVN, units went into combat well understrength.

The most glaring weakness in the RVNAF was poor leadership. The original group of senior officers was tainted in the eyes of many of their countrymen by their association with and dependence on the French: Diem's hope - often expressed to visitors - was that he could hold out long enough for a younger group of capable and loyal officers to work their way to the key command and staff positions. Few of the original senior leaders were ever fully loyal to Diem and too seldom to each other or to their soldiers. They remained "political animals," and ARVN remained a political Army. For the most part, all officers were selected and promoted more for their family, social, and educational status than for dedication, integrity, professionalism, and leadership ability. They were primarily from urban areas and knew too little about their own country-bred soldiers.

In the last five or six years of its existence, RVNAF did produce a number of honest, dedicated leaders and fighters; but they were constrained by their seniors and were too few, too late. The ever-increasing demands of the rapidly expanding RVNAF for leaders and technicians left far too little talent available for the governmental and civilian sectors. Despite the recognized shortcomings in the leadership of the armed forces, Diem and his successors opted for detailing a number of the better mid-grade officers to perform a variety of tasks that were primarily political e.g., as Chiefs of Provinces and Districts. Many of them were ill-trained and ill-suited for these sensitive, demanding duties at the crucial "rice roots" level. And, unfortunately, a number of them took this opportunity to enrich themselves and their families. On the average, the NLF did better in the all-important villages and hamlets.

7. Allies and Aid

From 1954 on, South Vietnam needed major outside support merely to exist; progress required a much higher level of aid and still the outcome was always problematic. For the first year and a half of her separate existence, France supplied the military muscle required for a modicum of security and stability; the US supplied the monies and materials. After France withdrew the last of her soldiers from RVN in April 1956, the US accepted the entire burden, with relatively minor exceptions, of trying to keep RVN independent, and noncommunist. The US's major European allies had political and economic problems of their own; few really approved of the US involvement, and none wished to become seriously involved.

Although goals changed over time, the initial US decision to intervene in Southeast Asia was based on perceptions of the global Cold War with the USSR (and "Monolithic" Communism), the take-over of China by Mao's communists, and the rapidly increasing political and military strength of the Viet Minh. Thailand and the "dominoes" remaining in French Indochina were to be protected by SEATO, then a newly created treaty organization designed to help contain Asian communism. The primary goals of the Southeast Asian countries which we supported were much simpler and vastly more vital to them: i.e., to survive.

The almost total dependence of RVN on the US for aid, and later for direct military support, severely constrained the national and international options open to their government. (They often did ignore or reject our advice, however, because of "face", and probably just as often because our suggestions were ill-timed and/or ill-founded especially with regard to political realities). An understanding of South Vietnam and her society, customs, politics, enemies, and the very nature of the political-military conflict was woefully inadequate among most US leaders, civil and military alike. The Americans did have self-confidence, optimism, ingenuity, industry, resources and widespread contempt for both the French (arrogant losers), and the South Vietnamese (inept, lazy, proud and cowardly).

8. Implications of Constraints

By merely compiling a list of some of the major obstacles that faced the newly created GVN and RVNAF - and those listed in the preceding sections are by no means all inclusive - it should become obvious that Ngo Dinh Diem and his regime were constrained, quite severely, in every major field of governmental responsibility. The expectations of the United States that Diem, or anyone else available, could build a modern, unified, and truly democratic nation-state in the milieu summarized above were typically idealistic and utterly unrealistic. The long-sought but never discovered Vietnamese "Magsaysay" might have pulled it off, but the odds would have been stacked against him too.

Domestically, Diem inherited "...a political jungle of warlords, sects, bandits, partisan troops, and secret societies." Working from his narrow and unstable political base, and saddled with a frail and badly-wounded economy, his freedom of action was severely circumscribed. If he had been able to generate an adequate corps of dedicated, competent and hard-working leaders, civil and military, his chances of survival would have been increased significantly, but there still could have been no guarantee of final success. His often heavy-handed efforts to bring the disparate elements of South Vietnam under central government control, surprisingly successful at first, helped create the climate that permitted the NLF and the PLAF to expand their influence and strength so rapidly. The lack of timely and accurate intelligence magnified that problem.



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Since RVN was a relatively open state, it was subjected to much more international scrutiny, and thus many more pressures, than was the DRV and the areas under NLF control; when things appeared to be going well this was an asset, but when the situation deteriorated, every wart in RVN, real or fabricated, was examined under many microscopes, resulting in a wide variety of prescriptions for the diseases so expertly or inexpertly diagnosed. A strong, well-established liberal democracy can absorb and even benefit from such minute and personal examinations and advice, but a fragile, newly created nation under extreme internal and external pressures probably is hurt more than helped by such treatment.

The repeated public announcements by high-ranking US officials that Southeast Asia - and RVN in particular - were "vital" to US national security interests exerted a powerful influence on what the Americans did there. Our political conception of the role of RVN in our global strategy of containment not only limited US options but also partially blinded US authorities to the inherent weaknesses and strengths in South Vietnam; this, in turn, placed limits on what the "client" state could and could not do. Since the RVN was almost totally dependent on US aid, she was physically, and to a lesser degree morally, bound at least to listen to advice across the spectrum of her governmental functions. This advice was accepted more often in the military field than in the political. The RVNAF Joint General Staff (JGS) had practically no voice in, or foreknowledge of, the force structure, equipment and training plans developed by MAAGV. The initial US misperception of the nature and extent of the security threat to RVN played a large part in providing the latter with a military force that was physically and psychologically improperly prepared to counter the NLF/PLAF during the crucial development stage of the insurgency.

The internal and external enemies of Diem's regime made every effort to ensure that Diem would not have the time, the stability, or the resources to build a stable government and state. The Viet Minh stay-behind cadres, after watching the neutralization of the sects and having suffered heavily from the RVN's "pacification" campaigns, decided to strike

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back before they could be rendered impotent by death, capture, and defection. (They also had lost any hope of reunification through elections.) Organizing and manipulating other discontented factions, Viet Minh reinitiated the first (or underground) phase of the insurrection, about 1955; some low key political and propaganda activity continued throughout the cease-fire period. Control was exercised by the leadership of the Lao Dong Party (Southern Branch). They needed and expected material and moral assistance from the regroupees in the North and also from the Northern (Main) Branch of their party.

The Lao Dong Party, in July 1954, established as their primary goal: "Vietnam was one and must be reunited" 10/ under Party control. They intended to do this, by peaceful means if possible but by force if necessary, in two stages: a consolidation of their position by building socialist unity and the economy in the North, and then by liberating the South. The Southerners were expected to be as self-sufficient as possible, but all "loyal" Vietnamese were "duty-bound" to assist. RVN's unexpected early successes, especially in crippling the stay-behind cadres, and the latter's reactions to these "terror campaigns" probably advanced the DRV's active support by a year or two. But they were ready, having consolidated power and mobilized resources, no matter how brutally, while screened from the glare of publicity. In 1959 the first of some 60,000 regroupees were infiltrated into the South 11/ and work was initiated to improve the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Weapons, ammunition and key Northern cadres soon followed by land and by sea. The Second Indochina War had started. Diem had only four years left, but the RVN would resist, with massive US support, for another sixteen.

Diem's early, and generally undreamed of, success had earned him such flattering sobriquets as "the Winston Churchill of Asia" (LBJ), and "tough miracle man" (Life).12/ This sort of euphoria created unrealistic perceptions and unattainable expectations among his supporters and many neutrals; it also ensured that his enemies, at home and abroad, would intensify their efforts to bring him down.

In the final months of this period, two omens appeared that were far more ominous than was generally recognized at the time. The first was the aborted coup by several airborne commanders in November 1960. That was the first major open split between Diem and his senior officers since the ousting of Gen. Hinh in 1954; the split never healed and as the mutual distrust and dislike grew, Diem became ever more withdrawn and dependent on his family. The second portent was the announcement by Radio Hanoi, in January 1961, of the formation and program of the NLF the previous month; to the too few knowledgeable observers, that announcement indicated that the Lao Dong Party irrevocably had committed itself and the full resources of the DRV, if required, to the take-over of the South.

Insurgencies are weakest and most vulnerable during the initial organizational and propaganda phase. Once the insurgents have gained adequate bases in and support from the people, and have gained strength and momentum, the costs in time, resources, and blood of defeating them rises dramatically; if they also are receiving substantial assistance from external sources, the odds probably have shifted in their favor. This period, then, was the best time for the RVN and the US to neutralize the Lao Dang apparatus in the South. (There would be a second opportunity between 1969 and 1972.) To do so would have required a correct and agreed an assessment of the problem by both governments, and the timely adoption of appropriate countermeasures - political, social, psychological, economic and military. The record of events shows the ultimate failure in all of these fields; the formidable constraints on GVN, discussed in this chapter, offer a partial explanation.

9. The Period in Perspective (See Figure 7-2 for the situation in 1955)

There existed a number of vitally important steps which should (and might) have been taken during this critical period to include: the development and effective use of competent civilian and military leaders; the mobilization of a base of popular support for the regime; the suppression of corruption; comprehensive reform of the legal and administrative machinery; the creation and training of military, paramilitary, and police forces more realistically suited to the existing situation and environment, etc.

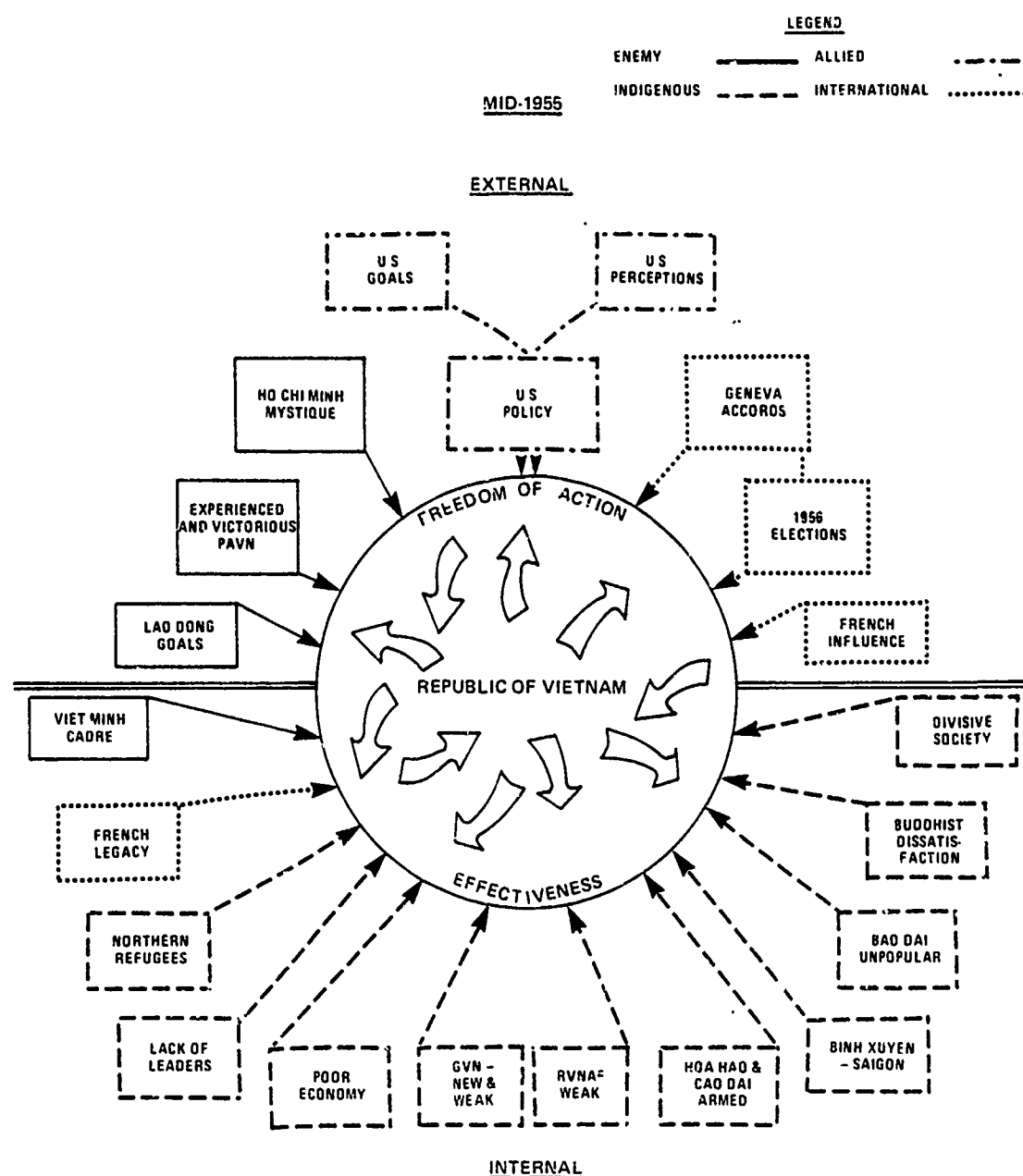


Figure 7-2. Major Constraints on RVN Policy Mid 1955

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Militating against the achievement of these imperatives were such factors as the French legacy, the fragmented society, the weak base of leadership, the fragile economy, the intentions and capabilities of the Lao Dong Party, and so forth. But heading the list of constraints must be the rigid and ultimately fatal character and personality sets and limitations of Diem and his family. (But could they be replaced, and with whom?) Second place must be awarded to the misperceptions and disagreements in the official US communities in Saigon and Washington. These shortcomings adversely affected our credibility with and influence over GVN and wasted invaluable time and resources.

### C. DURING THE MID YEARS (1961-1968)

#### 1. Geneva Accords

At the beginning of this period, both sides of the conflict made a pretense of living up to these agreements, at least for the record, and the ICC continued its charade. The visit of Maxwell Taylor's team to RVN in October 1961, resulted in the deployment of additional advisors, and the initial introduction of US-piloted helicopters and attack aircraft. The first rationale offered for this open violation of the Accords, was that these US forces were in country to assist in flood relief; <sup>13/</sup> the explanation was changed to a more realistic and candid basis, i.e., since the DRV was violating the Accords by infiltrating men and arms into RVN, the US was required to counter them. From late 1964 on, the Accords had little, if any, effect on either side except for propaganda purposes. (The DRV, however, stubbornly refused to admit that any of their own forces were in the South until after the fall of Saigon.)

#### 2. Social and Psychological

The stereotype of a Buddhist is that he is placid, non-violent, apolitical, unsophisticated and is content to find his reward in his reincarnation; this is especially true of the priests, or bonzes. The sight of bonzes calmly burning themselves to death in protest over Diem's policies created tremendous political and psychological shock waves worldwide; the

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quite quotable, but insensitive and impolitic, remarks of Madame Nhu about "barbeques" reinforced this international wave of revulsion. TV shots of brother Nhu's secret police and Special Forces clubbing bonzes and assaulting pagodas added fuel to the fire that burned almost out of control for months. It was a heyday for the foreign news media and set them on an irreversible collision course with Diem and his family and to a lesser degree with the US Country Team. It also set the standard for the new style of participatory journalism. The abhorrent polarization and the perceived persecution of a significant element of the society of South Vietnam also caused the US administration to reevaluate and then to change, diametrically, its "sink or swim with Diem" policy. The reaction of Diem and family to these heavy pressures should have been predicted; they became even more cloistered, defensive, intractable and increasingly less able to govern. What had begun as a small but unfortunate incident in Hue had exploded into a major crisis from which the regime never recovered.

The ill-fated Strategic Hamlet Program was initiated in 1962. The concept was more sound than generally believed and was based on the need first to separate, physically, the "fish" (insurgents) from the "sea" (the people), and second to separate them psychologically and politically through educational, economic, and social programs within the confines of the "secure" villages. The fortified village concept had its start in Vietnamese history and was successfully employed by the Viet Minh and later the NLF.

Ngo Dinh Nhu must be credited with the genesis of this program and not, as popularly believed, R.K.G. Thompson (later Sir Robert). It was to be a much larger and more ambitious follow-up to the aborted Agrovilles with the ultimate purpose of establishing and maintaining GVN control in strategic areas of the countryside. To help sell their scheme to the US and South Vietnamese, Diem and Nhu capitalized on the success in Malaya in the resettlement and control of the scattered ethnic Chinese squatters during "the Emergency".

No matter how sound the theory underlying the program, the hasty and faulty execution of it ensured its poor reputation and ultimate

collapse; even so, at its peak it caused serious problems and concern for the NLF. It got off to a very poor but widely publicized start with Operation Sunrise, which involved a group of villages in the enemy-infested Binh Duong Province. With Nhu in personal charge of the program, the province chiefs competed with each other for his favor by exceeding his unrealistic schedule; many of the Strategic Hamlets were poorly or not at all fortified and others existed only on paper. The program became unpopular with many of the peasants because they were not paid for their labor and they were increasingly exposed to NLF reaction; many were moved miles from their rice fields and ancestral groves. One of the first major decisions taken by the military junta which overthrew Diem was to dismantle the entire program. (Both Agrovilles and Strategic Hamlets will be analyzed in detail in Volumes V and VI. An authoritative and balanced view of the pros and cons of these schemes is contained in Douglas Blaufarb's The Counterinsurgency Era: US Doctrine and Performance.)

The heavy and widespread fighting during the latter half of this period created millions of refugees who fled from the countryside to the cities. This was an alien and initially undesirable way of life for most of them. The drastic social and psychological disruption was turned into a revolution of sorts by the presence of over half a million Americans and other foreigners in their country - roughly one for every thirty Vietnamese. Because of their history and culture, most Vietnamese are inherently xenophobic. The pervasive and ponderous presence of so many outsiders resulted in a socially destructive dichotomy: on the one hand, the traditional fear/hatred of foreigners and on the other, the instinctive realization that only the Americans' money, food and men kept the economy afloat and the enemy at bay.

A number of Vietnamese, usually the younger, rootless and impressionable ones, came to like and even became attached to Americans and their transplanted "way of life": clothes, music, money, drinks, drugs, the carefree and irreverent outlook, and so on. There also was more than enough opportunity for theft, graft, and all other sorts of corruption. City streets were full of young deserters or draft dodgers in their modish

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outfits riding their noisy and smelly Hondas - the "cowboys". Two new classes of young women also expanded proportionally with the influx of the relatively affluent Americans: bar girls/prostitutes and others who formed more lasting relationships, although quite often with a different man each year or so. The thousands of offspring, especially the black ones, of these liaisons were social outcasts, as were their mothers.

The psychological climax of this period was produced by the VC/NVA Tet Offensive but it was far different in outcome than the enemy had hoped and planned for. Instead of the "general uprising," so essential to their expectations of a total victory, the vast majority of the Vietnamese people, particularly those in the cities and villages that were attacked, remained neutral or became committed to the GVN, many for the first time. The people were incensed that the enemy had violated the all-important Tet holiday, and that they had brought heavy fighting into the heart of the cities - previously relatively secure sanctuaries. The brutal massacre of over 3,000 civilians at Hue also provided GVN with a powerful psychological and moral weapon which was exploited fully. 14/ After over ten years of war, GVN finally had a sufficient mandate from the people to decree total mobilization!

### 3. Political and Economic

The years 1963 - 1966 comprised the political abyss of the RVN, eclipsed only by the final 55 days of the Republic. Starting with the crippling Buddhist revolt, the political decline accelerated with the murder of Diem and Nhu in November 1963. For the next two-plus years, there was a crescendo of political instability, illegitimacy, uncertainty and chaos from the top levels of GVN down to the villages and hamlets. There is little doubt that GVN would have collapsed or been decisively defeated militarily, in 1965 if the US had not intervened with overwhelming ground, air and naval forces.

If Diem had a narrow and shakey political base, those who followed him in rapid succession had to "govern" while trying to achieve balance on a knife's edge; they couldn't trust even their fellow generals/plotters! Coups, counter-coups, and coup plots consumed so much of the



time and energy of the GVN leadership that little remained for running the government or fighting the war. The high hopes held by many Americans and South Vietnamese, that the overthrow of Diem would usher in a bright new era of justice, progress, prosperity and even peace, were soon shattered. (The US role in this crucial affair will be covered later in this paper and in detail in Volume III).

That violent change of leadership also brought about a radical shift in the influence held by political pressure groups. Under Diem, the Catholics and the minority non-Catholic Northern refugees exerted disproportionate influence. The resulting imbalance in power was a major factor in providing a "cause" for the militant Buddhists. After Diem was deposed and killed, these relatively few political Buddhists had their day-in-court with the coup leaders. Naturally, this placed the Catholic leaders in the position of being the strident and not-so-loyal opposition. The urban minority gained a further edge in influence over the rural majority. A growing class of influence wielders emerged--women; a number of wives and mistresses of powerful military and civil leaders soon became quite wealthy and exercised political power through their sponsors and/or their money. This influence was applied more individually than as a group since they tended to compete with and even hate each other. As two senior South Vietnamese refugees, put it, "Under the First Republic, there was only one Mme. Nhu, but after her, there seemed to be too many Mme. Nhu's in miniature".<sup>15/</sup> These same sources indicated that the power of the Mountain Tribes was overrated in the West because they were wooed by both GVN and the NLF; actually they were too dispersed in remote regions, and were split along tribal and language lines.<sup>16/</sup>

After each successive change of government, large numbers of heads of ministries, province and district chiefs, and senior RVNAF commanders were replaced by others thought to be loyal to the new regime; integrity and competency had little to do with the selection process. During that chaotic period, the NLF took over de facto control of a majority of the countryside and established strong clandestine bases in most of the cities. Although denounced and belittled by critics at home and

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abroad, the 1967 elections, which narrowly confirmed Nguyen Van Thieu as President and ratified a new constitution, provided for the first time since November 1963 a degree of legitimacy and stability to GVN.<sup>17/</sup> The belated reinstitution of elections for village officials was another positive factor as was the increasing freedom of debate in the legislature.

The effects of the political turmoil and the increasingly severe fighting during those years raised understandable havoc with an economy that was in terrible shape to begin with. Only increasing amounts of US, financial and material aid prevented widespread starvation and disease. Despite the introduction of new and improved agricultural techniques and products, such as petro-chemical fertilizers and "miracle rice," the normally rice-surplus region required large amounts of grain imports.

The huge and still growing US presence in RVN created an almost insatiable demand for goods and services which helped solve an incipient unemployment problem among the refugees. But conversely, it pumped so much money into the economy so quickly that inflation threatened to get out of control. Only the foresight and control measures imposed by the US Embassy and MACV, and later by the more stable GVN, kept this problem within reasonable bounds.

#### 4. The Enemy: PLAF and NVA

The enemy had a rare opportunity in late 1964 and up through mid-1965 to crush the RVNAF before the introduction of substantial US ground troops. During the near fatal aftermath of the Diem assassination, the PLAF enjoyed its peak period of growth, effectiveness and morale; they achieved a self-sustaining momentum that appeared to be irreversible. In 1965 they were destroying, on the average, one RVNAF battalion and seizing one district headquarters per week.<sup>18/</sup> The local GVN militia were deserting en masse and the regular ARVN units withdrew into a passive defensive shell. Even the very limited elite mobile reserve battalions - airborne, marine and ranger - were being chewed up and demoralized; once these were neutralized, the end of RVN was a certainty.

The Lao Dong Party, desiring to hasten the imminent collapse of RVN, and determined to control the take over of South Vietnam, dispatched

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regular NVA units to the pivotal Central Highlands; the first three NVA regiments were identified in or near RVN in December 1964.<sup>19/</sup> The increasingly powerful intervention of US ground and air forces first stabilized the situation and then gradually turned the tide. Their presence and power also raised the morale and confidence of both GVN and RVNAF, and provided time for the latter to regroup, refit and retrain.

The first major battles between US and enemy units - US Marines vs. 1st VC (PLAF) Regiment on Van Tuong Peninsula in August 1965, and a brigade of the 1st Air Cavalry Division against three PAVN (NVA) Regiments in the Ia Drang Valley in October 1965 - knocked some of the overconfidence out of both sides, but did slow the momentum of the enemies' multiple offensives.

During the next two and a half years, the US executed and dominated a "strategy of attrition". The exclusive air mobility and the overwhelming firepower of the US units took a tremendous toll of the PAVN and PLAF units. Many of their base areas throughout RVN were destroyed and at least temporarily denied to them.

According to conventional Western standards, the enemy should have been forced to negotiate on disadvantageous terms. But their leaders, particularly those in Hanoi, were determined to achieve their primary objective of unifying Vietnam under Party control no matter what the cost or time required. They were still well under their "threshold of pain." They carefully studied US tactics and techniques and developed fairly effective counters to most of them. They still exercised the overall initiative to disperse and evade or to stand and fight. When the latter choice was made, they normally had the option of where, when and how to fight. They also retained their overall superiority in foot mobility, night operations and surprise. By these means they continued to inflict significant casualties on US and RVNAF forces, albeit at a costly exchange ratio but with solid political and psychological gains for them. They were assisted greatly by their penetration of all levels of GVN and RVNAF.

They were able to create a worldwide image of a small but agile David fighting a huge but clumsy Goliath to a standstill. Their ability to

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withstand and overcome most of the effects of US air strikes added to their mystique. Nevertheless due mostly to superior mobility and fire power, by the end of 1967, the military situation was looking brighter for the RVN and the US, at least on the surface. In a series of bloody battles, most of the larger PLAF and PAVN units were defeated and pushed back to or across the borders. The previous summer, the enemy, realizing that their present strategy was not working, had to decide whether to resort to smaller scale protracted warfare, or to opt for a bold but risky offensive. After a vigorous debate, the Party leadership in Hanoi chose the latter course.

Although our intelligence sources predicted large-scale enemy attacks in early 1968, the actual timing, scope, magnitude and manner of their "Het Offensive" caught us by surprise.<sup>20/</sup> The enemy's ploy of drawing our major units and attention towards the borders was particularly successful, especially near Khe Sanh, and thus left the cities more vulnerable. US and RVNAF forces quickly recovered their equilibrium and went over to the counter offensive. Whether by clever design of the Hanoi politbureau or not, the cream of the NLF and PLAF leadership, political and military, was decimated during the next few months. Henceforth the Southerners would play a steadily decreasing role in deciding the major issues. In addition, the manpower needs of the PLAF units would be filled primarily with PAVN soldiers.<sup>21/</sup>

### 5. Geo-Strategic Position

By early 1965, the PLAF, supported by the initial NVA regular units, had exploited their inherent geo-strategic advantage; they had control of most of the key Central Highlands, except for the major cities, and were on the verge of cutting RVN in half. The PLAF dominated the Delta, and Saigon was practically isolated. US ground and air intervention prevented the total collapse of both RVNAF and GVN.

Despite the string of allied victories in 1966 and 1967, the PLAF retained base areas near, and undercover cadres in, the major cities. The NVA continued its buildup to threaten directly the North (Hue-Da Nang), the Center (Kontum-Pleiku), and the South (Saigon). They also continually

improved the capacity of the Ho Chi Minh Trails. The Cambodian Government, under pressure, permitted large amounts of supplies to be shipped through Sihanoukville and thence by road to bases near the Delta and Saigon.<sup>22/</sup>

During the latter half of that period, the US Navy and the growing VNN, through Operation Market Time, had reduced the direct seaborne infiltration into RVN to a trickle.

6. Military: RVNAF

Although the RVNAF steadily grew in size and armaments, most of the units generally declined in morale and effectiveness from 1964 through 1966. There was a brief encouraging upswing in 1962 with the introduction of US helicopters, tactical aircraft, armored personnel carriers and advisors down to battalion level. The battle of Ap Bac, in January 1963, openly demonstrated some of the major shortcomings of RVNAF. Diem's policy of holding senior commanders directly responsible for casualties had a restraining effect on them at Ap Bac and on other fields. Because that costly and ineptly fought battle was proclaimed as a major victory by GVN and MAAGV, it became a symbol of the fast-growing "credibility gap" between US and RVN governmental officials and the news media.

Poor leadership still was the major problem facing RVNAF during these early years.<sup>23/</sup> It was exacerbated as the force grew and as additional officers were assigned to non-military governmental positions. The May-August 1963 Buddhist crisis further eroded the effectiveness of the armed forces. (In March 1966 even the sturdy 1st ARVN Infantry Division, the guardian of the DMZ and Hue, was literally torn apart by this sort of intramural fight.)

The RVNAF senior leaderships again started to plot against Diem and Nhu; for the next two plus years they were practically ineffective in the fight against the NLF/PLAF. Their soldiers and the country suffered the consequences. Desertions increased as morale fell even further.

A major watershed during this period was the Battle of Binh Gia, fought in late December 1964 and early January 1965. The newly formed 9th VC (PLAF) Division, which had been rearmed by sea with modern weapons, stood their ground for four days (a first) and defeated - in succession -

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the best that RVNAF could throw against them. They decimated the 4th VNMC and the 33rd ARVN Ranger Battalions plus other reinforcements.<sup>24/</sup> This disastrous defeat sent a shock wave through Saigon to Washington and signaled the rapid down-hill slide toward inevitable defeat.

As discussed previously, US intervention prevented the final collapse of RVNAF and presented them with time to reorganize and retrain. Except for their mobile reserves, the majority of ARVN units were assigned pacification missions while the major fight against the large PLAF and PAVN Main Force units was carried out by the US; the war had become "Americanized" and the RVNAF were overshadowed and almost ignored.

That secondary and somewhat static role was probably necessary at first, but it was extended for too long to the detriment of RVNAF - and particularly of ARVN. It degraded their ability to plan for and control the maneuver of units larger than a battalion. That situation continued to exist, with minor exceptions, until mid-1967 when General Creighton Abrams, the new Deputy COMUSMACV, was assigned the primary mission of upgrading RVNAF.

Although many of the RVNAF commanders and units were uninterested in, and not properly trained for, their pacification role, they nevertheless were taking a steady toll of the PLAF guerrillas and the more critical political infrastructure of the NLF. A continuation of that trend would seriously restrict the ability of the NLF, and their "sponsors" the Lao Dong Party, to continue the insurgency. Possibly that was a factor in the enemy's decision to "go for broke" in the Tet offensive of 1968.

Most of the RVNAF units were at 50% strength, due to holiday leaves, and were caught more or less by surprise at Tet, yet the majority of them fought well and some superbly; no significant unit defected or disintegrated.<sup>25/</sup> During the series of battles, the RVNAF regained some of its damaged self confidence and prestige.

### 7. Allies and Aid

The US goals changed several times during this period. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the Kennedy-Khrushchev confrontation at Vienna, and the Cuban missile crisis, the RVN was selected as the testing ground of US

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resolve and as the laboratory for devising tactics and techniques to defeat "Wars of National Liberation". Our counterinsurgency doctrine depended on South Vietnam simultaneously winning both the political and military battles, as well as building a nation with our advice and material assistance. To accomplish those tasks required a stable, effective, and broad-based government, and loyal, aggressive, and professional military forces executing a consistent strategy based on a realistic and understood doctrine. Our perhaps unrealistic goals were not met.

After pressures on Diem failed to bring about the desired broadening and increased efficiency of his government, a change of ambassadors brought a change of policy. With Ambassador Nolting in charge of our "Country Team," it was "Sink or Swim with Diem." The worsening military situation and the embarrassing Buddhist upheaval in 1963 brought about yet another shift. Many mid-level politicians in Washington decided that the war could not be won with Diem and the Nhus in power. The rather clumsy attempts at separating Diem from his family predictably drove them even closer together. The infamous and improperly coordinated 24 August 1963 cablegram from the State Department to recently arrived Ambassador Lodge, opened an unforeseen and unfortunate Pandora's Box; in the cable, the USG more than hinted that it would not interfere if the RVNAF generals conducted a coup against Diem and Nhu. On the 29th of the month, Lodge cabled Secretary of State Rusk, "We are launched on a course of action from which there is no turning back: the overthrow of the Diem government."26/ (During the three months interval before the coup, the US waived but never reversed its course.) The US pinned their hopes on "Big Minh", but neither he nor the other bickering generals had sufficient support or ability to provide stability and efficiency, let alone to win the "hearts and minds" of the people.

President Johnson was in a hurry to win the war and to continue progress in his Great Society - the "Guns and Butter" policy. But the increasing demands of both continued to frustrate his administration. International and internal political pressures, especially the rising opposition to the war from academia, youth, and the liberal wing of his

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own party," made him decide that "we would seek no wider war." He also put out a wide mix of peace feelers in conjunction with unilaterally declared bombing halts and extended truces, which probably reinforced Hanoi's belief that their final victory would be won in Washington as it had been in Paris in the war against the French.

The shock of the Tet offensive--falling close on the heels of the seizure of the Pueblo by the North Koreans--reinforced by the sensational reports of the news media, strongly affected most of Johnson's closest advisors. It even turned a number of "Hawks" and fence-sitters into "Doves". The quick turn-around had a profound influence on the President. The result of the New Hampshire Primary, widely misinterpreted at the time, was the final blow to his resolve. Johnson decided that he would not run for re-election, would halt the bombing north of the 19th parallel, and would actively seek negotiations with Hanoi. His television talk on 31 March 1968, informed his countrymen and the world that a ceiling at last had been placed on what the United States would do in Vietnam. 27/

Another restraint on US and GVN options throughout this period was the fear of provoking active intervention in the war by the Chinese. Even after it became clear, belatedly, that the PRC-USSR split was real and deep, the potential threat of Mao's divisions marching to join the battle loomed large in the policy-making arena.

Initially, both MAAG and then MACV were overly optimistic in their appraisals and too conventional in their advice and assistance. Concentration of intelligence and operations was centered on the enemy's main force units at the expense of neutralizing the more critical political-economic-military infrastructure.

Air Marshal Ky's dramatic desire to "march North" with a "citizen's army" was a non-starter. Without US approval and assistance, there was no chance for the scheme to succeed; it was given short shrift by the US.

The responses of the USG and GVN, individually and collectively, to the unique challenges of the changing situation in Vietnam were impeded



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severely by inherent bureaucratic constraints such as inflexibility, inertia, and in-fighting, both in-country and in Washington. Robert Komer, who participated in the process at both levels, completed a study on the subject for Rand in 1971. He arrived at the following significant conclusions:

In sum, the underlying conclusion which emerges from this paper is the difficulty encountered by conventional government machinery--in this case both U.S. and Vietnamese--in responding optimally to such unconventional problems as we confronted in Vietnam. If our policy and performance fell so far short of our perceptions, we must seek the explanation largely in the factors which made our institutions so slow to adapt and so imperfect in their responses to felt needs. Bulking large among these factors is a series of institutional constraints--bureaucratic inhibitions--on adaptive response. They provide one major reason why it proved so difficult to translate policy into program, and program into practice, in Vietnam. Other things being equal, a bureaucracy will do its thing, and this is what bureaucracies did, in the absence of adequate management machinery at all levels to unify their effort and force them into different patterns of response.28/

The establishment of CORDS as a part of MACV, in 1967, was intended to unify and energize the various US and GVN bureaucracies involved in the critical field of pacification. Although much was accomplished in the next five and a half years, GVN, in the final analysis, proved itself to be incapable of effectively administering the multiple tasks on its own.

As the war ground on inconclusively, both GVN and RVNAF were subjected to growing criticisms, rational and otherwise, from an expanding body of individuals and groups in the US. Those groups included influential members of the US government, the more prestigious members of the news media, as well as sundry antiwar and peace activists. Ironically, in the late fifties and early sixties, many of these people were in favor of US intervention in Southeast Asia. but, over time, became more and more critical of GVN and RVNAF; that hostility had much to do with the decision to initiate, or at least not resist, the overthrow of Diem and Nhu. The

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one-sided news coverage of the fighting, especially by TV, convinced many in the US that our traditional way of war was inappropriate, illegal, immoral, and ineffective.<sup>29/</sup> Even numbers of so-called Hawks began to accept the charge of ineffectiveness, but they tended more to blame the restrictions put on the use of our military power for the prolonged and indecisive nature of the conflict.

From the early 1960's on, the NLF and the DRV gained increasing international sympathy and support at the expense of US and RVN, in part due to their sophisticated and obviously persuasive propaganda. Support was to be expected from communist and other leftist regimes, but anti-US/GVN criticisms eventually came from neutral countries and even from some of our closer allies. The UN became a favored and effective forum for attacking the "racist, imperialistic, neocolonialistic, and barbarous America" and her "tyranic, cruel, and corrupt lackies" to use some of the critics' terms.

The net result of those widespread, bitter, imbalanced, and often inaccurate polemics was to place both the US and GVN on the psychological and diplomatic defensive. They also led to restrictions on both ground and air operations and limited the strategic options, placing an additional heavy burden on the USG & GVN decision makers.

The political dynamics of the US were important to both the RVN and to the DRV: they signaled a warning to the former, but an opportunity to the latter who timed many of their major political and military offensives to influence US elections. The rising domestic impatience and disenchantment with the war in Vietnam made the 1968 elections much more of a worry to an incumbent Democratic President than would normally be the case. The futures of the President, his heir apparent, and the war were all at stake.

### 8. Mobilization

One of the shock waves that hit the US as a result of the Tet offensive, was the discovery that, after ten years of fighting for survival, the GVN had not even declared a General Mobilization! This rather

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incredible shortcoming shocked and incensed both pro and antiwar antagonists. It was most difficult to construct a rational and convincing explanation for such a major omission. The actual reasons for not mobilizing earlier were complex and based on a number of domestic and external pressures. Because of the unique mix of factors involved, this issue is examined separately below:

### a. Internal Constraints

- GVN had serious difficulties in accounting for and managing its manpower resources 30/
  - The inherited heterogeneous mix of the society of South Vietnam was complicated further by the rapid influx of almost a million refugees in 1954 and 1955, and also the millions of additional refugees, generated by the fighting
  - The pervasive presence of the NLF/PLAF, and later PAVN, in the countryside preempted a large segment of eligible young men, and a number of hamlets changed hands repeatedly.
  - The lack of an accurate demographic data base resulted in GVN and US manpower studies which were at best rough estimates
- GVN and RVNAF were incapable of organizing and enforcing a General Mobilization until mid-1968.31/
  - Even President Diem did not believe that his regime was strong enough to decree such a mobilization, or even to lower the draft age to 18 or 19; two senior ex-RVNAF Generals speculated that such a move might have further aggravated his shaky political position, and perhaps driven some of the youths into the ranks of the PLAF.
  - The political instability and illegitimacy of the "revolving door governments" which followed Diem, provided neither the environment nor the will for taking strong decisions.
  - Although in 1964 a Mobilization Directorate was established within the weak Ministry of Defense instead of under the JGS, only half measures and poorly enforced partial mobilizations were attempted.

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- Before they reversed positions in late October 1967, Ky and Thieu instituted "a decree for the partial mobilization of the nation's human and national resources" and Ky signed an implementing order for the conscription of men between the ages of 18 and 33 32/ But in December the new National Assembly voted their disapproval because of the lack of a fixed term of service and the lower draft age. 33/
- The military-civil leadership of RVN generally lacked the continuity, dedication, discipline, and cohesiveness of their counterparts in the DRV and NLF. And they were never able to articulate a strong and unifying cause that could compete with nationalism, unification, and anticolonialism; the concept of "anticommunism" was too vague for many South Vietnamese. In short, the revolving leadership possessed neither the theme nor the spark to mobilize the hearts, minds, or even the bodies of their citizens.
  - b. External (US) Constraints
- The JGS had little to say about, and thus gained little experience in actual force planning; the yearly plans were originated, after some coordination with RVNAF, by MAAGV (later MACV), blessed by the US Ambassador, modified and approved by the Executive Branch, and funded by Congress. Only then was JGS informed officially on what types and numbers of forces would be supported for the following year. Under such an arrangement, a full mobilization only partially funded would make little sense. 34/
- Until the rush for Vietnamization, the US was reluctant, and wisely so, to expand RVNAF faster than the size and quality of the officer and NCO corps would prudently permit; those finite assets were stretched even more thinly to provide essential leadership of the rapidly expanding RF/PF and the Revolutionary Development (RD) Cadre. 35/

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- In effect, US forces and RVNAF were in Competition for the same equipment until the production of M-16 rifles, etc. was accelerated; even President Johnson made note of that competition in his memoirs.36/
- The "Americanization" of the "big war" produced little incentive for RVNAF--most of whom were relegated to the more mundane (but most essential) pacification "little war"--to push hard for a major force expansion.
- There was little serious pressure from the US until 1967, on the GVN to plan for and implement a total mobilization. It generally was believed by the US military, that additional US units could finish the job faster and better than could more RVNAF; systems analysts in the US Secretary of Defense Office disputed this view.37/ (Yet, looking ahead, Gen. Westmoreland in 1966 had recommended, in vain, to the US Ambassador that US mission-wide planning be initiated for RVNAF mobilization and force expansion. The next year his recommendation was accepted and functional experts from the US helped develop a plan as a basis for discussions with GVN.)38/

### c. Discussion

- Logically and morally, a country fighting for its very existence should exert every possible effort on its own behalf, and not place the primary burden for its defense on its ally. Yet it appeared to many in the US that we were doing the paying, fighting, and dying while RVNAF willingly held our coat and alternately cheered and booed; there was some basis for that charge, but most of the misperception was formulated because the print and TV news media naturally concentrated the bulk of their reporting on US units. In retrospect, key RVNAF Generals believed that the imminent collapse of RVNAF & GVN in 1965 called for drastic countermeasures - among them general mobilization and a state of national emergency--but they further believed that the endemic political instability precluded such a move.39/ True or not,

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such a show of determination might have produced much needed political benefits, especially in the US.

- However, since the US kept a tight and exclusive hold on the purse strings, a total mobilization was impractical, if not impossible, without prior US concurrence and massive support. Additionally, neither the GVN nor JGS had the organizational structure or planning experience to execute such a wide-ranging and complex exercise. The military crisis in 1965 was so severe that MACV was fully engaged in procuring, deploying, and supporting sufficient US troops and planes to stem the tides. Nor, at that time, were there enough modern arms and ammunition to support, concurrently, a major force expansion by both RVN and the US.
- The constraints outlined earlier in this section help explain why the GVN waited until after the Tet offensive to declare general mobilization, but they do not explain fully why the US and GVN together, could not and should not have taken other important but lesser steps earlier to strengthen RVNAF, such as: lowering the draft age, extending the three-year term of service, recalling reserves, managing the draft better, and planning jointly for full mobilization. Part of the failure was due to the inefficiency, instability, indecisiveness, unpopularity and inexperience of the GVN. The US, in turn, was overconfident about the speed at which US forces could "nail the coonskin to the barn door", and misperceived for too long the nature of the war, the enemy and even of our ally.<sup>40/</sup> Economists might offer still another reason for not invoking general mobilization. Removing large numbers of male citizens from the agricultural sector and placing them in RVNAF would have reduced substantially an essential part of the labor force that provided subsistence. The financial burden of maintaining the RVNAF would have increased while tax revenues and supplies decreased.

9. Implications of Constraints

The year 1962 appeared to be one of progress. A significant increase both in the number of US advisors and in tactical support and the strategic hamlets placed the PLAF temporarily on the defensive. The illusion was shattered in 1963: the Battle of Ap Bac typified to many the inability or unwillingness of RVNAF to close with PLAF main force units. The inept handling of the Buddhist crisis cost Diem and the Nhus any residual world sympathy and eventually US support; the overthrow and assassination of Diem ushered in an extended period of political and military chaos.

Since the USG encouraged, or at least condoned, the military coup against Diem, we assumed an open-ended responsibility for the preservation of an independent South Vietnam. The eight or so "governments" which followed in the next three-plus years became even more dependent on US support. Theoretically, that state of utter dependence should have restrained their internal political bickering and plotting, but it didn't. Nevertheless, although the enemy made tremendous political and military gains during the ensuing turmoil, they never were able to gain control of the Buddhist movement.

"Americanization" of the war beginning in the mid-1960s staved off defeat and bought time for the eventual stabilization of both the governmental and military situations. This "younger brother" status, however, eroded the self-confidence of South Vietnamese leaders and delayed their maturation.

The on-and-off air war in the North (Rolling Thunder), while hurting the enemy's economy and war effort, gained neither the political nor the military objectives desired. The gradually expanding but tightly-controlled nature of the air offensive, along with various diplomatic approaches, were intended to send "signals" to Ho Chi Minh and the Central Committee (unfortunately the signals were broadcast on the "wrong frequency"); the GVN was allotted no meaningful role in these unsuccessful "carrot and stick" maneuvers even though their very existence was at stake.

The "Americanization" of the war, the economy, and even the politics during this period resulted in long-term adverse effects. South

Vietnamese leaders, civil and military, overwhelmed by both the pace and magnitude of US advice and assistance, practically abdicated their responsibilities and lost--or were denied--a meaningful opportunity to learn and grow.

The outcome of the enemy's 1968 Tet offensive substantially reduced several internal constraints on the GVN (e.g., the belated mandate to mobilize), but perversely produced longer-range deficits which more than canceled any gains. The battles in Saigon, Hue, Ben Tre, and so on, were refought, politically, in Washington, New Hampshire, and Chicago. The mandate as perceived by the US President-elect, and his National Security Advisor, was translated into a radical change in strategy: US withdrawal, Vietnamization, and negotiations. The enemy came to the negotiation table with firm resolve and high hopes.

10. The Period in Perspective (See Figure 7-3 for the situation in 1965)

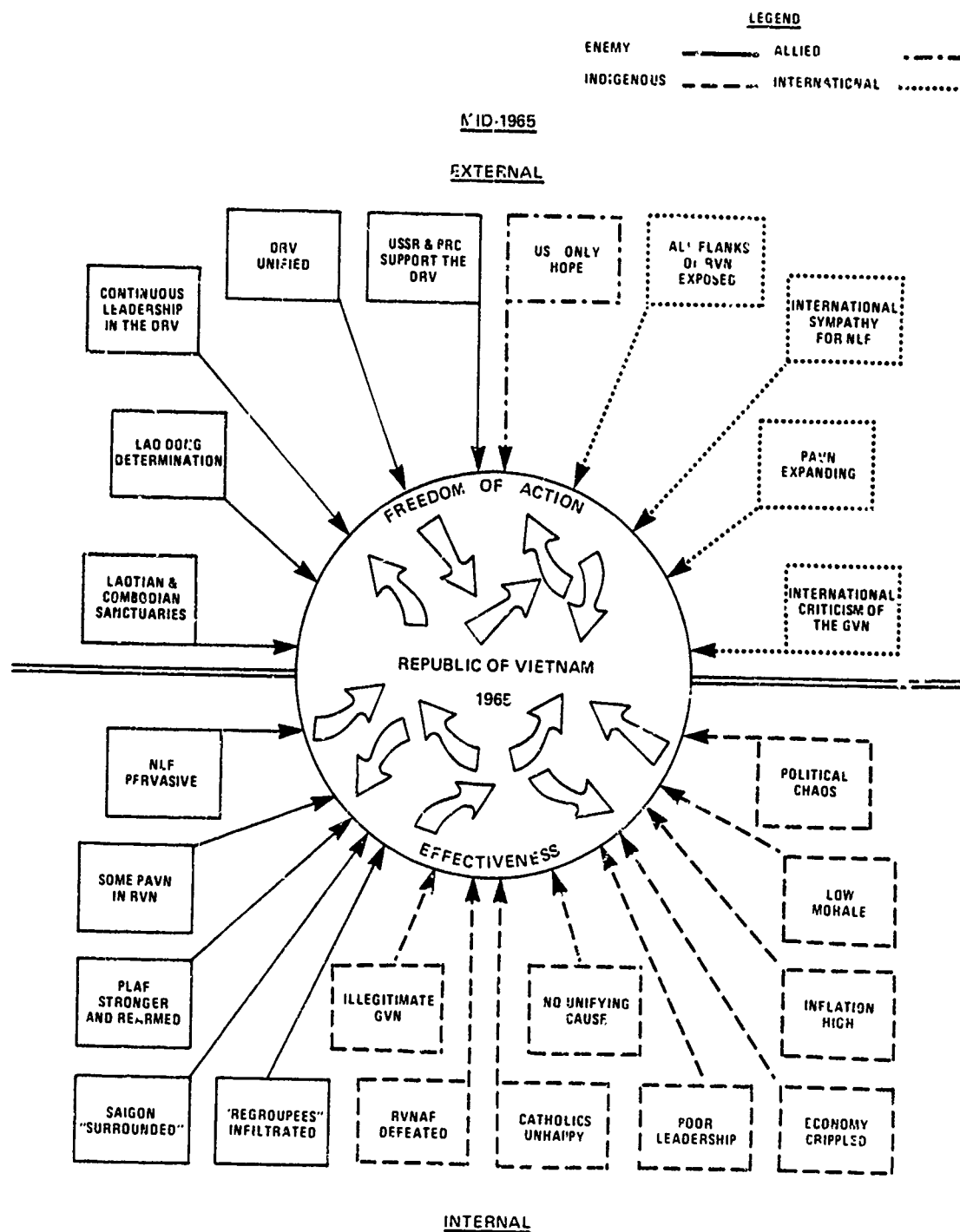
This was a most tumultuous period for both the RVN and the US. In the beginning, there was perceived a "light at the end of the tunnel", and at the end a US President conceded defeat even before the Party convention, and then his party lost the White House.

In between there was: the Buddhist crisis and the adverse US reaction to the GVN counteractions; the crucial overthrow of Diem and Nhu and the ensuing political instability; rapidly increasing insecurity and military defeats in the countryside to include the destruction of the Strategic Hamlet Program; the Tonkin Gulf incident and the US reaction; the introduction of US troops in RVN and the Americanization of the war; the RVN elections of 1967; unsuccessful attempts at inducing meaningful negotiations; and finally the dramatic Tet offensive of 1968.

Throughout most of these years, the principal constraints acting on GVN were: political instability and governmental ineffectiveness, the weakened economy and inflation, the growing strength of its internal and external enemies, and the increasing dependence on an ally which had lost the desire and will to pay the seemingly endless costs, especially in American blood, of the war.



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Figure 7-3. Major Constraints on RVN Policy Mid 1965

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The results of the Tet offensive strengthened the GVN, but ironically simultaneously weakened its major supporter. The primary contribution of the GVN at the "peace talks" in Paris was to insist that they would not negotiate with the NLF as equals so 1968 ended with protracted debates on the shape of the conference table.

### D. TOWARDS THE END (1969-1975)

#### 1. Geneva to Paris

The Geneva Accords brought about a ceasefire and several years of "peace" in Indochina. The Paris agreements, nineteen years later, also emphasized a ceasefire and peace but actually resulted in neither. The RVN was bound by restrictions about which she had little or nothing to say. Although both sides violated the agreements in various degrees, the RVN's transgressions were noted and duly reported in the world press while those of her enemies were either unreported or denied. Her only real hope of salvation lay in the private pledges made by President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, then the President's National Security Advisor.

#### 2. Social and Psychological

The social fabric of South Vietnam was still rent into many pieces, large and small, and defied GVN and US efforts to induce a working and lasting cohesion. A psychological "fever chart" of this period would show several dramatic highs and lows. After recovering from the rude shock of Tet '68, large elements of the still growing urban population returned to their former state of indifference to politics and the war. Yet the period from late 1968 to early 1972 was in many respects "the golden era" of the RVN; for the first time since the very early years of the Republic, the psychological momentum was swinging in its favor.

The primarily conventional PAVN "Easter Offensive", in 1972, provided a small but significant preview of the mass panic of March and April 1975. The people, especially in the two Northern Provinces, not only fled from the fighting but also from a possible repetition of the 1968 Hue Massacre; if the world at large had either ignored or forgotten that tragedy,

they hadn't. Refugee mobs streaming south seriously interfered with troop movements, and depressed morale in a number of ARVN units. The eventual outcome of those hard-fought battles, and the prompt and vigorous response by the US, had a salutary, if temporary, effect on the pride and confidence of civilians and military alike.

The signing of the Paris agreements in January 1973 brought about a brief mood of relief and even of euphoria. But those feelings over the next two years gave way to resignation and despair, especially among the knowledgeable, when it became increasingly clear that they were being abandoned by their mentor and major supporter. In true Vietnamese tradition, many of the senior leaders came to the conclusion that perhaps "fate" was not on their side; this in turn produced a sense of hopelessness which often resulted in lethargy.<sup>41/</sup> At the same time many of these leaders also believed, blindly, that the US would not permit RVN to fall and would intervene in strength (B-52's); this really was their only hope. This mixed mood at the top inevitably spread downwards and multiplied, thus setting the stage for the amazingly quick final collapse.

### 3. Political and Economic

Although providing more than a thin veneer of stability, and some increase in efficiency, President Thieu was unable to translate these achievements into a reliable political base. His primary internal support still rested with the senior military leaders. He did not trust them, nor they him. As a result poor and/or corrupt officers retained their commands. It is likely that he remained in power only because of the practically unconditional support given him by the US.<sup>42/</sup>

The RVN economy which showed encouraging signs of recovery during mid-period, took a dive towards the end. The adverse effects of the drastic reductions in US economic aid were compounded by the corruption and spiralling inflation which was fueled by the 1973 oil embargo. The withdrawal of US and other allied troops created widespread unemployment, especially in the cities near the major bases. The economic structure (goods, services, business, money, etc) too had become overly inflated by and dependent on the Americans.

4. The Enemy: PAVN and PLAF

The severe losses, and particularly those among the precious cadre, suffered by the NLF and PLAF during the Tet offensive(s) were never really made good. Although PAVN and the Lao Dong Party sent replacements, these Northerners did not have the appeal or the local sensitivity of the native Southerners. The expanding and improving Pacification Programs, supported by the RVNAF, took a steady toll of the PLAF and hurt the all-important NLF political infrastructure. Sir Robert Thompson and others have stated that by the end of 1971, the insurgency in RVN had been defeated.<sup>43/</sup> The "in place" ceasefire, the reduction of US aid, the attrition of RVNAF, etc. provided an environment conducive to rebuilding the strength of both the NLF and the PLAF; thus they were able to play a minor but useful part in the 1975 final offensive.

After major defeats in the big unit battles from mid-1965 through 1968, PAVN was in need of a respite and a new strategy. The debates of the Central Committee centered around two major alternatives: a retreat to a protracted low-scale guerrilla war, or a continuation of the attempt to modernize and expand PAVN in preparation for another "general offensive". With foresight, they chose a middle course: the conduct of widespread "super guerrilla" operations to buy time for the re-equipment and retraining of the rapidly growing PAVN; the USSR, and, to a lesser extent, the PRC provided the necessary tanks, artillery, missiles, and other military hardware. <sup>44/</sup>

While preparing for the large conventional battles, they maintained morale and a degree of initiative by sapper\* and standoff rocket and mortar attacks against cities and allied bases. Occasionally those low-cost operations were supplemented by heavy assaults on isolated outposts and fire support bases. That operational mode required the defending forces to disperse countryside, and induced a sense of insecurity in the urban areas; they also grabbed the news media's attention.

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\* Composed of highly selected, experienced and motivated soldiers who were skillful with explosives and small arms, and were adept at silent infiltration.

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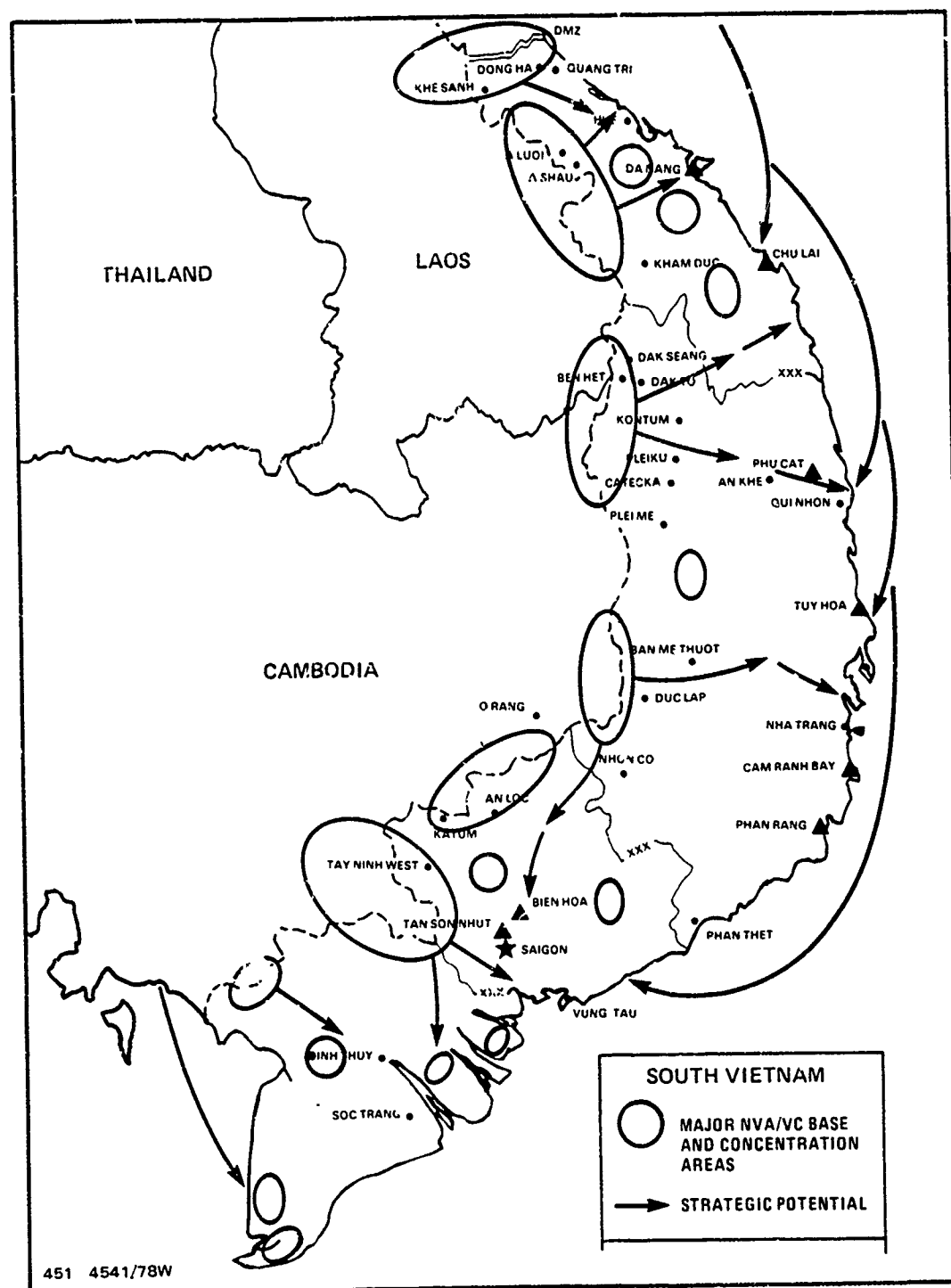
It took PAVN four years to prepare for the massive and primarily conventional offensive of 1972. The steady erosion of the NLF and PLAF during those years and the nearness of the US general elections probably influenced the timing and the manner of the assaults; the PLAF played an inconsequential role. After gaining initial success due to surprise, numbers and fire power, the three main attacks soon lost momentum because of US air, materiel, and moral support as well as the bravery of the average RVNAF soldier.

With their usual thoroughness and willingness to criticize their own faults, the Lao Dong and PAVN leaders studied what went wrong and developed corrective measures. (Their major errors in 1972 were improper coordination between the combat arms--infantry, armor, and artillery--and inadequate service support for mobile operations.) The slugging battles fought in 1974 kept ARVN dispersed, wore down their mobile reserves, and chipped away at South Vietnamese morale and confidence and tested for possible US responses. By early 1975, the balance of power had shifted decisively in favor of PAVN and the rebuilding PLAF.<sup>45/</sup>

Good deception and strategy, determined leadership, and improved execution of mobile tactics, aided by serious blunders on the other side, brought them complete victory in less time than they had expected. They had finally achieved their primary long range goal.

### 5. Geo-Strategic Position (see Map 7-2)

The 1972 the offensive left PAVN in control of key terrain in Northern, Central and Southern RVN. The 1973 in-place ceasefire resulted in PLAF and PAVN forces scattered in "leopard spots" throughout the South. The expansion and extension of the Ho Chi Minh trails (one parallel branch was inside RVN as were West-East laterals) and pipelines as far south as Loc Ninh, provided PAVN with strategic mobility and resupply capabilities never before possessed. The long sea flank again was open to infiltration. The withdrawal of over 600,000 US and allied troops left RVNAF facing an increasingly superior enemy who held the initiative. The sum of these added up to a strategically impossible situation for RVN.



Map 7-2. Geo-Strategic Vulnerability of RVN After the Jan 1973 Ceasefire.

Saigon, the Central Plateau, and the Hue- Da Nang area were kept under steady pressure. To employ the small and dwindling general reserves to prop up either flank was to leave the center invitingly weak, and vice versa. RVNAF was forced into both a tactical and strategic defense posture. PAVN, at last, was in a position to carry out its long delayed strategic objective of cutting RVN in half, and then of defeating their enemy in detail.

Time was working against the RVN and for the DRV. Part of this pressure was internal as civilians and soldiers alike became more discouraged and more weary. The main pressure, however, was from the outside. Of particular importance was the steadily growing impatience of the US population and the Congress, which was translated into US withdrawal from combat and then into deep cuts in aid. The DRV, enjoying the luxury of initiative and considerable external support, was able to employ time as a negotiating weapon as well as to build PAVN into a formidable conventional force. From 1969 through 1971, the time constraint on RVN appeared to be diminishing in force, but the hostile international reaction to the US and RVNAF incursion into Cambodia, and the increasingly severe Congressional restrictions on the employment of US military forces pointed the other way.

6. Military: RVNAF 46/

As a whole, the RVNAF performed creditably during the Tet 1968 offensives. In 1972 a few units disintegrated, most fought well, and some of them performed superbly. Overall, they did well in Cambodia, but demonstrated glaring critical weaknesses in Laos in 1971, especially in the planning, command and control of large units, mobile warfare, and senior leadership. These same weaknesses created serious problems in 1972 and led to disaster in 1975.

Thieu's policy of defending every remote outpost to the last, compounded by the "leopard spots," under enemy control dispersed RVNAF to the point of inelasticity. Belated efforts were made to increase the size of the strategic reserves--airborne, marine, and rangers--but additional manpower of the right quality was difficult to obtain, and the US did not provide adequate support for such a force expansion. A continuing high

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rate of casualties and desertions made it difficult even to keep existing combat units up to strength.

As noted in the quotation opening this chapter, General Dung, the chief PAVN planner and operational commander of the final offensive, admitted that the opponents were forced to fight "a poor man's war" from 1973 on. While PAVN was receiving large amounts of modern weapons and equipment, the increasingly sharp cuts in US aid together with the "galloping inflation" produced a shortage in spare parts, fuel, ammunition, and even in combat equipment permitted by the Paris Agreements to be replaced on a one for one basis. Their overdependence on US ways and means thus became a severe constraint.

The Joint General Staff (JGS) of RVNAF estimated that between the ceasefire and 1975, their firepower had been reduced by 60% and their strategic mobility by 50%. They had to hedge against even further reduction, or even the cut off of US aid. This placed them in a grossly inferior position to fight a larger, stronger, and more determined enemy.

The "Americanization" of the war, from mid-1965 through 1968, exacerbated many of the senior leadership failings in RVNAF. Being shunted aside, they did not learn how to plan for, coordinate, or fight large and mixed units. The staffs were poorly selected, trained and employed; they were merely the "errand boys" of the commander who was "everything". The heavy political and territorial duties of the corps and division commanders ill prepared them to fight large mobile battles; in addition, these non-military responsibilities provided more temptation for graft than many of them could resist. An encouraging number of solid, experienced, battalion and regimental commanders had emerged, but their effectiveness was often constrained by ineffective superiors who seldom accepted or even listened to suggestions from subordinates; nor were the latter prone to offer such advice.

The average South Vietnamese soldier, and this includes Marines, airmen and sailors, was as good as his counterpart in PAVN or the PLAF, when he was properly trained, adequately supported, and above all, well



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motivated and led. Unfortunately for him and his country, these prerequisites too seldom were realized in concert. He was trained by US methods in US tactics and techniques, often by officers who had failed in combat, and who preferred form over substance. He was "spoiled" by the abundance of US-supplied firepower and means of mobility and "forgot how to walk". When the reduction of US aid adversely affected him on the battlefield, he felt deserted and helpless. When the final offensive caught his leaders off balance, he often chose loyalty to his family over that to his unit or country. But then so did too many of his leaders, and some of them were the first to desert.

A significant number of both US 47/ and RVN generals have concluded that Vietnamization came too late and too fast, and probably they were correct. The large scale American intervention bought time and relief for RVNAF, but the opportunity was not exploited properly.

The JGS was not a joint staff in the true sense, but was more like a personal staff for President Thieu. They developed no real strategy of their own; USMACV wrote the Combined Campaign Plans which were translated into Vietnamese, then signed by the chairman of the JGS. They had no real authority; President Thieu often issued orders directly to the corps commanders without even informing, let alone asking for advice from the JGS. This sort of off-the-cuff command and control played a large part in the March 1975 disaster on the Central Plateau which led to the precipitate disintegration of RVNAF. From the beginning to the end, RVNAF's major weakness was inadequate senior leadership, perhaps inevitable in a "political" army.

### 7. Allies and Aid

After the 1968 general elections, the goals of the US underwent a major reorientation. The deduced new priorities were to: 48/

- Reduce US casualties, dramatically,
- Get US prisoners of war back, plus a full accounting for the missing in action,
- Turn over, as rapidly as possible, the ground fighting role to the South Vietnamese,

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- Fully support the accelerated pacification programs,
- Withdraw US forces according to plan (often unrelated to the military situation in RVN), and, if possible,
- Purchase through negotiation a "decent interval" for RVN and for US prestige and credibility.

US goals were seldom stated quite this baldly, for both political and psychological reasons, but over time they became quite obvious to all but the naive or uninformed. Wishful thinking might also have foreseen a free and independent South Vietnam, and that would have been a welcome byproduct; but the US wanted to get out of the war at almost any face-saving price, and the Lao Dong leaders knew it. US bargaining options were few and relatively fixed. Further, the new administration was much more concerned with global strategy--detente with the USSR and the opening to the PRC, peace in the Middle East, etc.

President Thieu had very little influence in the Paris negotiations. Under extreme pressure from the US, he was forced to accept an in-place ceasefire and other disadvantageous agreements. He would have refused to compromise on such vital issues if it had not been for the explicit written and oral assurances, from President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, that the US would react quickly and strongly to any major aggression by the DRV. 49/

A growing majority in the US Congress, frustrated by the war and its devastating domestic impact, passed legislation which progressively constrained the freedom of action of the Commander-in-Chief. At first those restrictions focused on military actions in South East Asia, but became global in nature with the passing of the War Powers Resolution in November 1973, overriding a strong Presidential veto. 50/

The Watergate incident and its repercussions destroyed one President and severely constrained his successor. The drastic Congressional cuts in US aid to RVN, and the resulting impact on the war, were discussed in the previous section.

In planning their final offensive, the Lao Dong leadership deduced that the US would not or could not react quickly or strongly enough

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to influence the outcome; they were right. The capture of Phuoc Long Province in January, 1975 provoked only a mild diplomatic and no military response from the US. That open retreat from unequivocal pledges should have forewarned Thieu and his generals. Yet, until late in April they continued to hope, in vain, for the return of the B-52's. They had no other choice.

### 8. Implications of Constraints

The Lao Dong Party never wavered from their priority goal of reuniting Vietnam under their control despite the periodic change of strategies and tactics. That fact, when combined with the aid provided them by the USSR and the PRC, while US support for RVN rapidly diminished, signalled the real beginning of the end. This "signal" was misread even by many knowledgeable people because:

- Vietnamization appeared to be going well
- Substantial progress had been made in Pacification of the RVN countryside from 1969 through 1971
- RVNAF, with strong US support, had turned back the 1972 offensive
- There was yet another misreading of the Lao Dong's intentions and determination.
- There was an overly optimistic assessment of our influence with the USSR and the PRC as well as their influence with the DRV, the ultimate target.
- The 1973 ceasefire fueled false hopes that the conflict would be settled peacefully by political give and take between the DRV, the PRG, and GVN. (This view was fostered by clever Lao Dong propaganda)
- The Watergate affair distorted the views and sapped the energy of the US Executive Branch.
- The free world news media had higher priorities at the time.

### 9. The Period in Perspective

From 1969 until the enemy's Easter offensive of 1972, the prospects for RVN appeared to be increasingly bright in most areas. With increased US interest and support, both Pacification and Vietnamization

seemed, on balance, to be progressing quite well. PAVN and PLAF Main Force Units were licking their serious wounds and were re-equipping and rebuilding; they managed to keep the war alive in the news media by relatively cheap sapper and mortar/rocket attacks on cities and US/RVNAF bases. "The facts are that the United States and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) had effectively won the war by mid to late 1972, and then - in America's case, at least - proceeded to discard that victory."<sup>51</sup> The Lao Dong Party then had only two major options from which to choose: political competition with GVN while attempting to regenerate the faded insurgency, or an all-out conventional/military invasion of RVN.

They opted for the latter course, which was eventually defeated. The strong US retaliation - mining of the harbors and concentrated air attacks with "smart bombs" and B-52s - left the DRV in an extremely precarious and vulnerable situation at the close of 1972. They gained far more politically at Paris than they had earned militarily.

In January 1973 morale generally was quite high in South Vietnam although senior GVN and RVNAF officials were deeply concerned about the "in place" ceasefire and the pressures for a coalition government, no matter under what guise. From this point on until the fall of Saigon, the constraints imposed on the DRV were removed one by one, but those facing the RVN became overwhelming. (See Figure 7-4):

- Remaining US military forces in RVN were withdrawn and the enemy correctly deduced that they could or would not be reintroduced in time or strength enough to count.
- After a surge just prior to the ceasefire, US aid was cut drastically in each succeeding year and the Congress imposed increasingly severe restrictions on the use of US forces.
- The cuts in US aid, the oil embargo, and a crippling inflation had severe adverse effects on the economic, political, military and psychological environment in RVN; these types of pressures drove the never-fully reconciled fragments of the South Vietnamese society even further apart.

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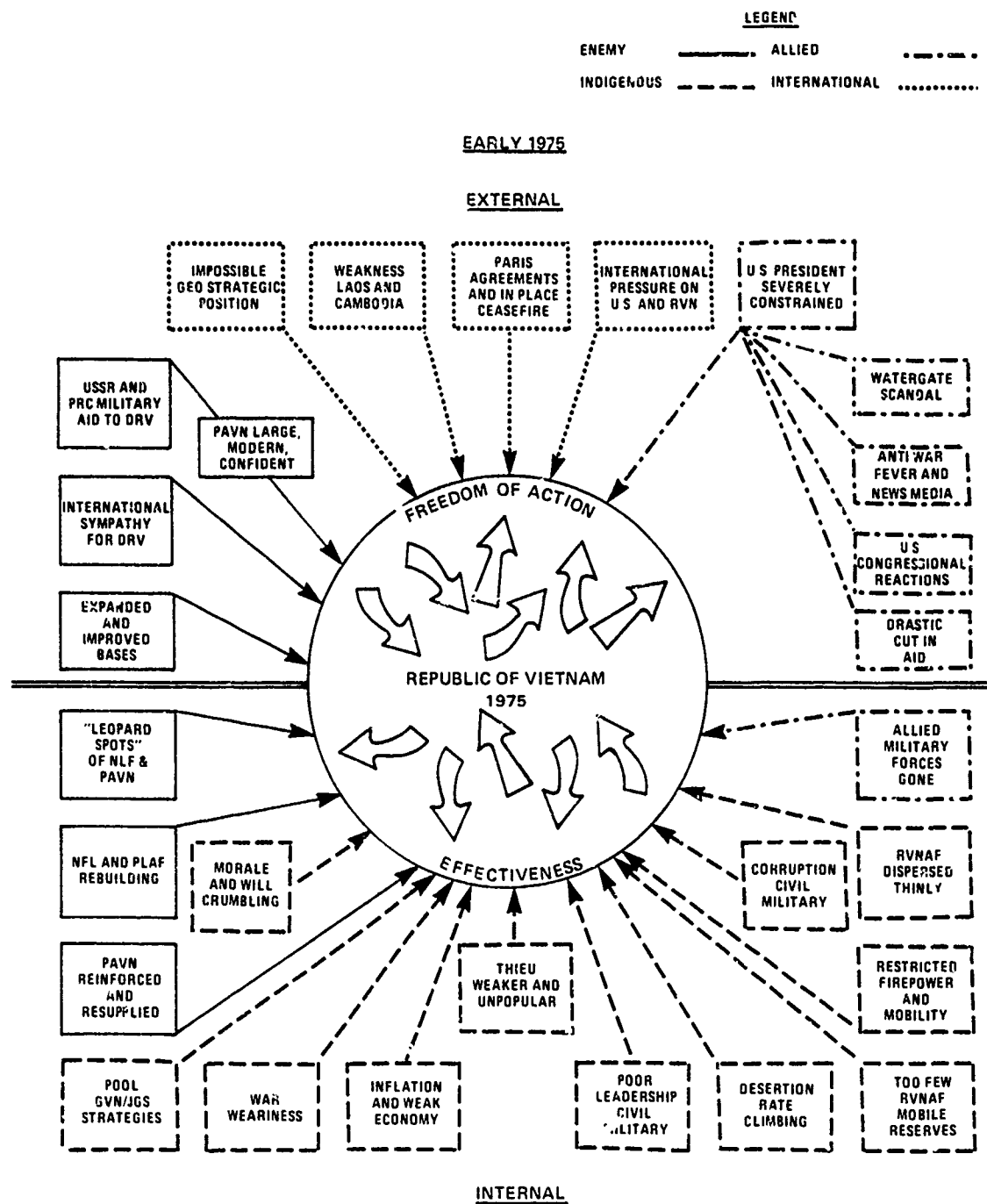


Figure 7-4. Major Constraints on RVN Policy Early 1975

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- Governmental and military leadership shortcomings were compounded by the growing internal and external forces pressing in on RVN; the serious weaknesses of some of the "political" leaders in RVNAF were exposed during the latter phases of Lamson 719 in 1971 and in the opening battles of the 1972 Easter offensive.
- The withdrawal of the US CORDS administrative and advisory network left an unfillable gap; GVN was incapable of sustaining the momentum and relative efficiency of the Pacification Programs.
- The ceasefire of 1973 left RVN in an extremely disadvantageous geo-strategic position which became even worse as the Ho Chi Minh trails and pipelines were improved and extended.
- With the massive doses of military aid from the USSR and the PRC, PAVN steadily grew larger, stronger, more modern, and more confident. During 1974 the balance of power shifted decisively in their favor. (See Figure 7-5.)

The North Vietnamese claimed that they won a "victory" in Paris, and events proved them to be correct. The US, in effect, was out of Vietnam while PAVN forces were permitted to remain in and near the South. Freed from US air attack and with their harbors reopened, they were able to improve and expand their logistics infrastructure and to enlarge and modernize their forces. During these two-plus intervening years the will, strength, and effectiveness of RVNAF were declining, slowly at first but rapidly towards the end. There should have been no surprise in the USG at the final outcome, and only a little at how quickly it came about.

### E. SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS

The preceding survey of the most significant pressures brought to bear on the RVN, from within and without, produced the insights which follow. They are selected for presentation because they shed partial light on why the conflict in Southeast Asia turned out as it did, and they also have relevance for the development of meaningful lessons.

JANUARY 1973			MARCH/APRIL 1975				
FOREIGN SUPPORT & AID	EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES	MILITARY FORCES	TACTICS	CASUALTIES	MORALE	RESULTS	
PAVN & PLAF	STEADY INCREASE	SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN QUANTITY AND QUALITY ACROSS THE BOARD	LARGE, MORE MODERN AND MOBILE	AGGRESSIVE AND CONFIDENT	RELATIVELY LOWER	HIGH AND INCREASING	RAPID AND DECISIVE VICTORY
RVNAF	DRASTIC REDUCTIONS	LARGE SHORTAGES OF POL SPARE PARTS AMMUNITION & WEAPONS	WEAKER IN FIREPOWER, MOBILITY, AND COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS	DEFENSIVE AND CAUTIOUS	HIGHER (AND MORE DESERTIONS)	LOW AND DECLINING LEADING TO LETHARGY AND HOPELESSNESS	TOTAL DISINTEGRATION

NOTE AS DISCUSSED IN THE TEXT, MANY OTHER FACTORS (CONSTRAINTS) INFLUENCED THE FINAL OUTCOME, INCLUDING RELATIVE GEO STRATEGIC POSITIONS, AND THE DIFFERENCES IN CHARACTER AND PROFESSIONALISM OF OPPOSING LEADERS

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Figure 7-5. Shifts in Balance of Power Following 1973 Ceasefire

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### 1. Negotiations

- The US failed to exploit fully several opportunities for increasing its bargaining power.
  - The split between the USSR and the PRC, and the fragility of the link between the latter and the DRV, (and to a lesser extent the differences between the NLF and the DRV)
  - The dire straits of the DRV in December 1972, due to the air strikes, the mining of the harbors, and capped by the "Christmas B-52 Blitz"
- Since World War II the US has failed to come up with a successful formula for conflict termination both in Korea 52/ and in Vietnam; neither GOK nor GVN had much leverage or influence on the talks.
- The communists' (or totalitarian nationalist) "talk-fight" model, plus their willingness to suffer inordinate casualties to gain political goals, severely constrains the US--and thus, by default, our client allies--in the negotiation process.
- Secret Executive agreements/promises, unblessed by the US Congress, will (and should) be highly suspect by any ally.
- Premature attempts to negotiate with a determined and unified enemy likely will be interpreted as a sign of weakness and a lack of will.
- Even when the balance of military power is heavily in our favor, (such as in December 1972) we are in a weak position during negotiations which take place after our people and Congress have "signaled" to our leader and to the enemy that they fervently want to end a struggle.
- Any nation fighting for limited and changing goals has extreme difficulty in negotiating, successfully, with any nation(s) who is fighting a total war for a single, implacable aim.

### 2. Social and Psychological

- By not understanding, or misunderstanding - until too late and even then not fully - the inherent constraints imposed by the



heterogeneous and volatile nature of the society in the RVN, US officials made a large number of faulty decisions and offered, or force-fed, unsound advice - political, psychological, economic, and military (of course there were many exceptions to this generality).

- The total dependence on and trust in US support ensured that the South Vietnamese would be unprepared psychologically to withstand severe stresses when that support was withdrawn.

3. Political and Economic

- The "mantle of nationalism" preempted and ruthlessly worn by the Viet Minh was inherited by the DRV and the NLF, leaving little maneuver room in this key area for GVN and the RVNAF.
- The idealistic hope, in the US, that RVN could ever evolve into a modern Western-style democracy, while constrained so severely by strong internal and external forces, led to unrealistic expectations and then to frustrations and disenchantment and was a superb enemy propaganda weapon as SVN failed to meet expectations; this course of events adversely affected the GVN and the conduct of the war.
- The political leverage applied to GVN was often the wrong type, at the wrong time, and was alternately too little or too much due to our ignorance of their society, history, leaders and the nature of the enemy and of the conflict itself (our few people who knew these matters best were too seldom in decision-making positions).
- Suggesting, or condoning, the overthrow of Diem was both naive and self defeating since we did not (or could not) foresee the disastrous consequences or a suitable replacement; that one act placed severe constraints on our freedom of action and on the effectiveness of both GVN and RVNAF.
- The close identification of many of the senior GVN and RVNAF officials with the French and even more so with the Americans diminished their credibility as nationalists and made them vulnerable to the propaganda label of "lackeys".

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- We were unable to wean the RVNAF generals away from political ambition and intrigue, which seriously weakened even the relatively stable Thieu regime.
- The imbalanced and weak economy of RVN constrained both the political and military freedom of GVN.
- The presence of over 600,000 foreign troops in RVN, the "American way of war", and the enemy's strategy ensured that the already fragile economy would become almost totally dependent on US aid; it is quite possible that the DRV could have attained its ultimate objective sooner or later, without the final offensive, due to the collapse of the South Vietnamese economy. (But Giap and others with the support of the Lao Dong Central Committee, were determined to achieve unity by military force to preclude any "messy" political delays or obstructions.)

#### 4. The Enemy

- Our gross misunderstanding of the enemy - his will, character, determination, ingenuity, organization, goals, etc. - resulted in policies and programs which forced GVN and RVNAF into untimely or inappropriate actions and reactions; it also resulted in a higher cost in time, money and blood than our people would endure.
- Our faulty concept of two wars - the "real" one and the "other" one - was maintained for too long and was inferior to that of the enemy, who could wring political and psychological gains from military defeats.
- The enemy's political-military strategy, on balance, was superior to ours; the GVN had no strategy worthy of the name partially because we had spoon fed them often faulty US concepts for too long.
- The ability of the Lao Dong Party to maintain the support of both the USSR and the PRC was a masterful balancing act, and essential to their ultimate success.
- The enemy carefully analyzed and profited from his and our errors--strategic, tactical, psychological and technical--much better than did GNV and RVNAF (or the US).

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### 5. Geo-Strategic Position

- The nature of the terrain, and the practically uninhibited use of "Sanctuaries" in the eastern parts of Laos and Cambodia, made RVN always very difficult to defend; the withdrawal of US forces and support, and the "in-place" feature of the 1973 ceasefire made it impossible to defend against a strong determined, and well supported enemy.
- The proximity of the PRC to the conflict constrained the US, and thus GVN, throughout the war, possibly unnecessarily so.
- A united DRV, with effective control over both Laos and Cambodia, now places them, and thus indirectly the USSR, in a very strong position to influence or coerce the rest of Southeast Asia; conversely the influence of the PRC is weakened.

### 6. Military: RVNAF

- In a developing, largely rural nation it is easier and better to train and equip "up", as did the Viet Minh and later the PLAF and PAVN by necessity, than it is to try the reverse, under pressure, as did the RVNAF towards the end; they had "forgotten how to walk" and could no longer afford to ride or fly.
- RVNAF, due to our advice (insistence) and the ineptness of most of their senior leaders, were unprepared, physically and mentally, to meet the enemy at critical stages of the conflict:
  - In the late 1950's and early 1960's they were organized, equipped and trained to fight a possible battle against PAVN, but not the actual struggle against the NLF and the PLAF.
  - In Laos, in 1971, they tried, at our urging, to employ US tactics and techniques without the necessary means, experience or leadership; their ultimate defeat there should have acted as both a warning and a prod.
  - At the onset of the 1972 Easter offensive they were prepared to fight battles at individual "fire support" bases, and

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were caught by surprise by the massive mobile warfare tactics and equipment employed by PAVN; with our advice, aid, and air power they did recover fairly quickly.

- In 1975, they still had not absorbed the "lessons" of 1971 and 1972 and thus were totally unprepared, again, to fight a large-scale war of movement. (Of course by that time they had neither the means nor the will to defeat the enemy, but they should have done much better than they did.)
- One of GVN's most difficult tasks, and serious failures, was to build a strong and reliable leadership corps in RVNAF. Considering the nature of the social base and the background and political ambitions of the senior leaders, perhaps the problem was intractable. US advice in this crucial issue was ineffective.

### 7. Allies and Aid

- The image of the US as a loyal, strong, and dependable ally was severely tarnished during the final agony of RVN, but given the nature and aim of the enemy, the final die was cast in January 1973; the patience of the American people and their Congress was exhausted.
- The types and quantity of aid and advice given to them shaped both GVN and RVNAF into fragile and alien imitations of our institutions and therefore were unable to stand on their own.
- US support of the relatively open RVN - to news media, assorted critics, etc. - and the impact of the "American way of war" (aided and abetted by clever NLF/DRV propaganda) resulted in increasingly severe domestic and international criticism which hindered both what we did and how we did it; any future US intervention, even superficially resembling the Vietnam Conflict, is likely to provoke similar, if not worse, recriminations unless we can "prove or sell" at home and abroad:
  - the legitimacy and the importance of the US national interest, i.e., as evidenced by a declaration of war or similar solemn instrument

- the "justice" of our means and ends
- and the appropriateness and effectiveness of our response
- The failure of GVN to mobilize, or even to lower the draft age, until after the Tet offensive was due to their multiple shortcomings as well as to the costly lack of foresight by US officials. Whether such measures could have succeeded earlier or not lies in the realm of conjecture. But the failure to try, cost the RVN indispensable moral and political support in the US, and helped ensure that true Vietnamization would come too late.

F. LESSONS

These broad lessons were derived from the analyses and insights presented in the preceding sections.

- To enter, voluntarily, a political-military struggle without a sound knowledge of your enemy, your ally, or the true nature of the conflict is to invite repeated and costly escalations and possibly distortion and even ultimate frustration of your initial aims; in the painful process, from beginning to end, one's ally is likely to become unduly contorted and constrained by inappropriate advice and assistance.
- A weak and fragmented ally faced by a strong, determined, and "nationalistic" enemy becomes more dependent, over time, on his benefactor, and can become even weaker in the process by becoming estranged from his natural sources of potential strength.
- The "American way of war", to include our approach to strategy which artificially separates politics and fighting and almost ignores the psychological medium, is an inappropriate response to a well organized and led, and externally reinforced, communist style insurgency and ill serves the real needs of our ally. (This sort of conflict is likely to remain the most prevalent method of gaining political ends through the use of force for some time.)

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- The longer an ambiguous, indecisive but costly struggle lasts, the more the separate goals of the defending allies will tend to diverge and impede mutual cooperation. (Conversely, the skillful balancing act performed by the DRV between the USSR and the PRC is as much a monument to our misperceptions and ineptness as it is to their adroitness).
- Weak civil and military leadership in a "host country" severely or even totally constrains their effectiveness and thus that of their ally(ies); US power can prop up such a shaky structure but can not make it sound; so when the US eventually withdraws this prop, such a structure could collapse at a nudge or even of its own top heavy weight.
- The US still has not discovered how to terminate, on favorable terms, a protracted but "limited" war against a determined enemy and so must develop an effective counter to the "fight-talk" negotiation tactics (employed so successfully by the communists in Korea and even more so in Vietnam); otherwise it is almost certain that we and our allies will continue to suffer unnecessary setbacks. (This lesson also points to the problem of extricating the US from treaty commitments that no longer serve the interests of the US.)

### G. A FINAL WORD ON CONSTRAINTS

This chapter took a quite broad view of the constraints placed on the freedom of action and efficiency of both GVN and the RVNAF. Although all governments and armed forces face major obstacles which must be overcome or circumvented, the constraints impacting RVN were most formidable by any standards. Many of them were inherent in their society and politics while others were imposed by their internal and external enemies. While US misperceptions and incorrect policies inhibited their freedom of action, RVN could not, and did not survive without our full support.

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52. Although the US eventually attained its initial objective of forcing the North Koreans (and later Chinese communists) out of South Korea, a terrible price was extracted from us during the protracted negotiations. Before the talks started, in 1951, the US had lost about

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12,000 men killed in action, but 21,000 more were killed during the negotiations. Throughout this later period, the enemy retained the initiative as to where, when, and under what conditions battles would be fought during the talks. US forces were constrained by major political and psychological pressures. For additional insights on the Korean negotiations see Admiral C. Turner Joy's How Communists Negotiate (Santa Monica, CA.: Fidelity Publications, 1970), and Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp's Strategy for Defeat, pp. 156-157.

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The following persons participated in the BDM Senior Review Panel meeting on February 13 and 14, 1979 at The BDM Jones Branch Conference Center. Members of the panel provided a critique of the original drafts for this volume and offered detailed comments during the panel discussions.

Braestrup, Peter. Editor, Wilson Quarterly. Former Saigon Bureau Chief for the Washington Post and author of Big Story.

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Davis, Vincent, Dr. Professor and Director, Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce, The University of Kentucky.

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Johnson, U. Alexis. Chairman of the Senior Review Panel. Career Ambassador. Former Under Secretary of State and former Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Thailand, and Japan, and (in 1964-65) Deputy Ambassador to Maxwell Taylor in the Republic of Vietnam.

Sapin, Burton M., Dr. Dean, School of Public and International Affairs, The George Washington University. Former Foreign Service Officer.

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